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Modern Palestinian Filmmaking in a Global World

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

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Abstract

This dissertation employs a comprehensive approach to analyze the cinematic accent of feature length, fictional Palestinian cinema and offers concrete criteria to define the genre of Palestinian fictional film that go beyond traditional, nation-centered approaches to defining films. Employing Arjun Appadurai's concepts of financescapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, ethnoscapes, and ideoscapes, I analyze the filmic accent of six Palestinian filmmakers: Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, Ali Nassar, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad, and Annemarie Jacir. After a detailed examination of each filmmaker's body of work, I examine the trends that occur across the genre that have the greatest impact on the Palestinian filmic accent and that differentiate the genre of Palestinian film from that of accented cinema more generally. These trends include the interstitial nature of Palestinian fictional filmmaking, the importance of relationships between Palestinian filmmakers, the seeming necessity of travel to the education and training of the directors, and the invasive nature of the Israeli occupation on any film made in or about the West Bank or Gaza. My analysis identifies a thematic shift within the genre from a focus on collective and nationalist themes to themes that center upon individual experiences of occupation. While other scholars argue this shift is the result of new directors entering the genre, my analysis identifies this trend within the corpus of individual directors whose work spans the entirety of the Palestinian fictional film genre, indicating this shift is the result of a change in accent rather than the result of the appearance of new directors. By examining both the individual accent of Palestinian filmmakers and the regional accent of Palestinian fictional film, I deduce that the thematic shift from collective to individual experiences is accompanied by a move toward increased reliance on Palestinian funding and personnel for these cinematic projects and increases in the availability of these films to Palestinians living in Israel proper as

well as those living in the West Bank and Gaza. From this information, I have concluded that Palestinian fictional cinema is in the process of a significant change in accent, indicating that the accent of a regional cinema changes over time in addition to changing across areas and individuals, which Naficy has previously noted.

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In addition to the help and support I received regarding the actual researching and writing of this dissertation, I am a firm believer that no one makes it through a PhD program relatively unscathed without the emotional and psychological support of friends and family. I would have become a miserable hermit without the social nudging of Joshua Cunningham and Leslie Burns, while Stephanie Scott and Anna Johnson were instrumental in reminding me that I was not, in fact, losing my mind, even when it felt very much like I was.

My mother, Carolyn Hudson, and sister, Claire Gordon, also contributed to the maintenance of my sanity throughout the two years of dissertation writing and six years of

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I also owe an unpayable debt of gratitude to Jake Pipinich for his love and support throughout this process. Through all of the moments of frustration, anxiety and despair, he loved me despite my grouchiness, always pushing me forward, and both I and this dissertation are the better for it.

Dedication

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Judge James S. Hudson, Jr. (1954-2009), whose passion for justice and love of a rational argument were, at times, both inspiring and infuriating for those who lived with him.

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Chapter One: Palestinian Cinema, Globalization, and Accented Cinema

As non-Western film developed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and as once colonized countries developed national cinemas, Palestine's brutal and prolonged struggle for national independence left the endeavors of its cineaste orphaned in a global economy of national cinemas. Despite the lack of support from a developed national cinematic industry, Palestinian filmmakers have neither given up nor slackened in their efforts to produce high quality films that represent themselves and their visions of life in Palestine and its people. As with several non-Western cinemas that developed during times of armed conflict (Armes), Palestinian cinema began as almost exclusively documentary and at the service of political actors (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian Cinema*; Alexander "Palestinians in Film" 321 and "Is there" 154). However, as technology advanced, the occupation changed, and Palestinians spread throughout the world, new cinematic doors were opened to Palestinian directors who wished to pursue feature, rather than documentary, filmmaking.

The changes and seemingly rapid advancements in globalization opened new educational, technical, and financial opportunities for Palestinian cineaste which, in turn, has resulted in the development of a distinctly Palestinian cinema, though this point has often been debated by scholars and Western film industries alike, and the term remains debated. Livia Alexander, for example, argues that there is no Palestinian cinema in the traditional sense of a national cinema that relies primarily on funding and government support from one particular country ("Palestinians in Film" 320 and "Is there" 151), and while she may technically be correct—there is no film industry that is supported by a national government in the West Bank and Gaza—the Palestinian national situation in general can hardly be said to be traditional or normal. Though she acknowledges this lack of a national cinema, she argues that the concept of the national is

still a useful and acceptable framework with which to approach Palestinian films because “the national still continues to play a vital and indispensable role in shaping the Palestinian audiovisual media” (“Palestinians in Film” 320). Though Alexander acknowledges that more recent films tend to be more individualistic and internally oriented (“Is there” 151), the national, alone, is no longer adequate to define a Palestinian cinema whose financial, production, and distribution processes as well as directors and filmic content are located in transnational, marginal, hybrid spaces. To focus on the presentation of national issues within the films as the primary sources of genre definition ignores or underplays a host of other factors that also contribute to defining Palestinian cinema. Under such non-traditional circumstances, it is not surprising that a cinema would evolve that does not fit the traditional definition of a national cinema.

The confusion on how to categorize films that are listed as Palestinian or are submitted by Palestinians in film competitions and festivals further demonstrates the difficulty of terminology in this case. While many film festivals accept submissions from Palestinians without comment or conflict, disturbances sometimes arise because films are generally, though certainly not always, categorized according to their primary source of funding or the location of production. Because there are no production companies in Palestine and funding for Palestinian films comes from a plethora of nations, Palestinian films are sometimes difficult to categorize.

Nizzar Hassan discusses an instance in which he submitted one of his films to Input’s film festival only to have it categorized first as “the rest of the world” and then as Afghan because Input, at that time, did not recognize Palestine as a state. This mis-categorization then led to difficulties finding funding for travel to the festival in question as well as safety concerns for Hassan (108). A particularly poignant example of both the difficulties and politics of

categorizing Palestinian films can be seen through the Academy Awards in the United States. In 2003, Elia Suleiman's film, *Divine Intervention* (2002), was purportedly denied consideration for an Oscar because the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences stipulated that each entry must be submitted by the government of its home country, and the Academy, at that time, did not recognize Palestine as a country (Doherty and Abunimah). Though the Academy denied these claims, this rather public spat most likely paved the way for *Paradise Now*'s nomination three years later, though how to label the films continued to prove problematic. The Academy eventually settled on listing the film's country of origin as "The Palestinian Territories" (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences). The insistence of directors like Hassan, Suleiman, and Abu Assad as well as others on their Palestinian roots and their refusal to allow their films to be labeled anything but Palestinian has, on these two as well as other occasions, forced the film world to recognize that there is, in fact, a cinema of Palestine, though, like Palestine itself, it does not conform well to traditional definitions.

This definitional fuzziness often leads to question as to what, exactly, constitutes a Palestinian film. Must the director be Palestinian? Must he or she live in or have lived in the West Bank, Gaza or Israel, or do Palestinians born and raised in diaspora count as well? Must the film be about Palestine or Palestinian issues in order to be considered "Palestinian?" Must the filming take place in the West Bank, Gaza or Israel? Must the funding come from predominantly Palestinian sources? Must the production and editing take place in the West Bank, Gaza or Israel? In such murky waters, clear definitions of what films comprise and result from a "Palestinian cinema" become all the more important. Omar al-Qattan, himself a prominent advocate for Palestinian films and an important cineaste, reflects on such matters in his contribution to *Dreams of a Nation*. He eventually settles on a rather broad definition: "my own

preference is to call Palestinian any film engaged with Palestine, and not to limit the name to narrow nationalist boundaries” (111). While that is certainly one way to look at the situation, it is not a particularly helpful definition for scholarly work. Anna Ball and Helga Tawil both discuss the difficulties of defining Palestinian cinema then proceed with their analyses without offering a clear definition. The criteria that US Palestinian film festivals use to accept or reject films is a helpful place to start narrowing the qualifications. Most Palestinian film festivals in the United States operate with a much more flexible definition of what is and is not considered a Palestinian film than the larger and more prestigious international festivals. Pittsburgh’s Conflict Kitchen, for example, had to consider the number of slots they had available for films (only three) as well as the message they were trying to convey as a film festival. According to Blaine Siegel, Conflict Kitchen strives to be a voice for and provide a platform to speak for people who live in places under conflict (personal interview). Their purpose tends more towards education and awareness rather than overt politics—in so much as the two can be separated. As such, they placed more importance on the authenticity of the story and how it was told rather than on the politics of the films. In fact, they tried to expressly avoid more controversial films, such as *Paradise Now*, because controversial films might detract from the organization’s greater mission. The films they did finally choose, *Five Broken Cameras*, *Divine Intervention*, and *When I Saw You*, had several things in common including the fact that the directors were all Palestinian, all three films were filmed in Israel and the West Bank, and all three films dealt primarily with the Palestinian life experience. The Boston Palestinian Film Festival, a considerably larger and longer running Palestinian film festival, is able to be somewhat more flexible in its criteria. According to Katherine Hanna, a co-founder of the Boston festival, they accept films “of cinematic quality by Palestinian filmmakers, regardless of where they reside or the subject matter of the film, and

[they] select films which speak to some aspect of the Palestinian narrative, regardless of country of origin” (personal interview). The Chicago Palestinian Film Festival, the oldest Palestinian film festival in the US, has three primary qualifications, at least one of which must be met in order to be considered for their festival: “[1]The film must have a [Palestinian] director, actor, producer or someone with a creative say behind it. Even if the subject matter is not Palestinian; [2] The film must have Palestinian themes, characters or be shot in Palestine; [3] The film must reflect Palestine and its people in a positive light” (Shelo). The trending qualifications in these festivals are that a film must have a Palestinian involved in the creative process *or* must be filmed in Israel/the West Bank/Gaza *or* must treat Palestinians themes. It is the goal of this dissertation to examine a handful of fictional films that adhere to all three of these qualifications and are generally agreed to be “Palestinian” in the hopes of developing a definition of Palestinian cinema that relies on a consideration of content and production processes rather than purely nationalistic thematics or governmental involvement or financial support. While the edges of what can be called a Palestinian cinema often become blurred, there is a group of full length fictional films that are created by Palestinians *and* filmed primarily in Israel/ the West Bank/Gaza *and* predominantly treat a variety of Palestinian themes. These films are also difficult to categorize as anything other than “Palestinian” films. Despite the continued lack of a formal national film industry or financial support from the Palestinian Authority (PA), these films can most accurately be described as the core of a Palestinian fictional cinema, though they certainly do not represent an exhaustive list of films that are important or central to a Palestinian cinema.

The goal of this dissertation is less one of defining the boundaries of what does and does not count as a “Palestinian film” and more one of defining the center of the category in an attempt to answer the question: if Palestinian cinema cannot be defined along national lines or

purely thematic lines as more traditional cinemas have been, how can it be defined? What characteristics make this group of generally agreed upon as “Palestinian” films congeal into a discernable “cinema of Palestine?” The edges of such a category can be debated in later works. While scholars can generally agree that all of Elia Suleiman’s and Rashid Masharawi’s feature length films are “Palestinian,” Hany Abu-Assad produced *The Courier* (2012), which is decidedly *not* considered “Palestinian,” between producing *Paradise Now* and *Omar* (2013). We can see, then, that the director’s nationality alone will not suffice as a definitional marker and neither will the source of funding. Palestinian films’ funding comes from a variety of locations, very few of them genuinely or entirely Palestinian. While all the films that I chose to address in this project are filmed, at least in part, in Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza, a number of films that treat the difficulties of life for Palestinians in exile, such as *Amreeka* (2009) or “Homage by Assassination” (1992), are predominantly filmed elsewhere. Furthermore, most directors received training in Europe or the United States, either live or own homes in those Western countries, and spend significant amounts of their time there. Because the Palestinian population is so diffuse and life experiences of Palestinians are so varied, limiting the definition of a Palestinian cinema by insisting on a single location of filming or its director’s place of residence seems ill fitting as well. Given the inadequacy of any single quality or characteristic to fully encapsulate the idea of a Palestinian cinema, perhaps the truth lies in in-betweens, or hybridity, as cultural critic Homi Bhabha would put it, and the particularly hybridized position of diaspora communities.

Part of the difficulty in defining Palestinian cinema is the result of the diasporic nature of Palestinians in general and the changes in the role and significance of nations in an increasingly globalized economy. The term “diaspora” has a long history, but a surprisingly loose or at least

heavily debated definition for scholarly purposes. Though the term was adopted most regularly in reference to Babylon's forced expulsion of the Jews from Israel and subsequent scattering of the Jewish people throughout the world, diaspora has come to be used to refer to many different types of groups of people living outside their natal country or regions, and its meaning now varies greatly (Cohen 24). However, not every community of persons living outside of their home country can or should be said to belong to a diaspora community. Robin Cohen, borrowing from and adding to William Safran's list of six characteristics of diaspora communities (83), lists nine characteristics that can be used to categorize a displaced community as a diaspora community:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
4. an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Cohen 26)

While both Safran and Cohen clarify that a diaspora community need not experience all of the afore mentioned criteria to be considered a diaspora (Safran 83; Cohen 25), a combination of a significant number of the criteria should be present before scholars treat groups of displaced people as a diaspora community. Both scholars situate the Palestinian communities in the West as diaspora communities and there is little disagreement about that categorization in the literature

on Palestine. However, such a definition is still quite broad, so it will be useful to mobilize Hamid Naficy's concept of accented cinema to help distil and clarify the nature of the relationship between the Palestinian diaspora and Palestinian cinema. Because Naficy draws heavily on theories of hybridity as well as globalization and modernity, it is necessary to first discuss the relationship between these theories.

In a world where the role of nations and nationalism is shifting in relation to changes in globalization and modernization, it stands to reason that the role and capacities of pseudo-national, diasporic entities such as the Palestinians, Kurds, Armenians and other communities that have been denied national status is also in a state of flux. Even the usefulness of "the nation" as a classification has come under question in some globalization research; however, other scholars argue that the concept itself is still a useful analytical framework, though it has altered significantly under the forces of globalization (Phillips and Reyes 8). Specifically, Brubaker discusses several trends in social theory in the 80s and 90s that he argues have shaped changes to the conception of groups, and therefore, the nation, as 'real.' Among these trends, he specifies the development of constructivist approaches that "see groupness as constructed, contingent, and fluctuating" (13) and the postmodern tendency to emphasize "the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the erosion of fixed forms and clear boundaries" (13). These two concepts in particular also appear to have influenced Palestinian filmmaker's conception of and response to both Fatah's and Hamas' visions of Palestinian nationalism.

Much of the current research on globalization and hybridity has eschewed the traditional interpretation of globalization as homogenization (and Westernization) in favor of an approach that emphasizes a plurality of experiences (of nations or of social worlds) of globalization and hybridity, speaking of *hybrdities*, *globalizations*, and *modernities* (Darling-Wolf; Kraidy;

Arnason; Pieterse). The rapid increases in technology, greater ease of travel and international communication, as well as the increased awareness of the world as at large have had significant impacts on the world as a whole. Perhaps less obviously, those impacts have not been universally experienced in the same way, at the same time, or under the same conditions, which has given rise to different experiences of globalization and modernity—some of which are encompassed within national boundaries and some of which are not. Many scholars (Darling-Wolf; Kraidy; Arnason; Phillips and Reyes; Pieterse) emphasize the importance of local culture and traditions on experiences of the global or the modern. Darling-Wolf specifically cautions against approaches that are not sensitive to cultural and historical contexts in his examination of the relationship between different media texts and their circulations between the US, France, and Japan. Keeping these scholars in mind, it is important to situate both the directors and their films within their specific ‘hybridities,’ which share a number of characteristics with one another but are not identical.

Drawing on Arjun Appadurai and Homi Bhabha as well as others, Hamid Naficy categorizes Palestinian cinema and other exilic and diasporic cinemas as ‘accented.’ He defines accented cinema as cinema created by those, predominantly from the third world, who produce film in exile or diaspora predominantly for the first world. The modes of production that structure the base of these films tend to be interstitial and collective (Naficy 40). He goes on to develop an expansive and somewhat unwieldy list of characteristics of accented cinema and a large corpus of filmmakers and films that he categorizes as accented, which is not entirely surprising given his relativistic approach. The accent of any given cinema, like the accent of any given person, depends on a variety of situational factors that are almost impossible to coherently and absolutely define on a grand scale, though Naficy does categorize accented cinema

according to the position of the director as exiled or diasporic and offers some general characteristics that *most* accented films share such as epistolary narratives, imagined homelands, tight spaces in exile, and journeys, among others. In his description of accented cinema writ large, Naficy includes the position of the director in relation to his or her home country, the methods he or she must use in order to create accented films (which he calls modes of production), and common themes and tropes that appear in accented cinema. However, in addition to this structure, which he proposes should be used to examine accented cinema, he also argues that cinematic accents should be examined via the director—as each director will tend to have an accent particular to him or her—and the country with which the film is associated (typically the director’s home country)—as accents frequently vary according to the different homelands (15-7). In fact, in his own analysis, Naficy examines the accents of various regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa (17) as well as individual films and filmmakers throughout the book.

This dissertation will borrow from Naficy’s framework to help define Palestinian fictional cinema. It will first address the accents of individual directors and then proceed to discuss how those accents merge in order to create Palestinian cinematic accent that both adheres to and varies from Naficy’s general definition of accented cinema in crucial ways. Though auteur approaches to cinema have been debated and debunked in certain contexts, it is appropriate to focus so much attention on the director alone when treating accented cinema because, unlike in Hollywood where a film may have several writers, directors, producers, etc., in accented cinema in general and in Palestinian cinema in particular, the director is usually the force that holds the project together. He or she often occupies numerous positions such as writer, director, producer, and sometimes even actor. Because of the extensive involvement of the director, accented films

can more genuinely be said to be a product of the director him or herself (Naficy 48-9). While the concept of accented cinema is useful for defining the films of exiles and displaced persons worldwide, in the Palestinian case, such a concept becomes the defining characteristic of the entire cinema, as it has developed thus far. Whereas an Egyptian in exile in Europe may make an accented film, Egypt does have a national cinema, making the accented films from Egyptian exiles a distinct category from the national cinema. To continue with the analogy to language, Egypt has a “standard” cinematic language in its national cinema and an “accented” cinematic language in the films produced by Egyptians in exile and diaspora. As Naficy points out, “Palestinian cinema is one of the rare cinemas in the world that is structurally exilic, as it is made either in the conditions of internal exile in an occupied Palestine or under the erasure and tensions of displacement and external exile in other countries” (“Palestinian Exilic” 91). Palestine, because it lacks the infrastructure and stability required for a national or governmental film industry, has no national cinema and therefore no national cinematic language, making Palestinian accented cinema the only cinema that can be said to be Palestinian and the foundation of Palestinian cinematic language in general.

Though cinematic accent will be a central, defining feature of the definition of Palestinian fictional cinema this dissertation seeks to propose, it is not the only feature. In *Dreams of a Nation*, Naficy draws attention to an important distinction between Palestinian accented films and other accented films. Unlike Algerian or Turkish accented cinema, which has predominantly taken place in single countries, France and Germany respectively, Palestinian films come from a variety of host countries (91), including Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and the US. Borrowing from and expanding upon Robertson’s theory of ‘glocascalization,’ Darling-Wolf employs a ‘translocal’ approach, which examines the interactions between specific local texts

and experiences across international borders. Such an analysis of the local, national, global nexus, as Darling-Wolf calls it, is a useful approach for grappling with how the creation of Palestinian films involves the interaction of several localities in several different nations that produce a product which then circulates globally.

Because of Palestine's somewhat unique situation in the world and its exiled and diasporic filmmaker's relationship to that situation, Palestinian cinema does not perfectly fit Naficy's definition of accented cinema in all respects. Alexander explains that the experience of Palestinians in diaspora is distinct from many other types of diasporic filmmakers because Palestinians come from a colonized land in a world that is mostly postcolonial. As a result, she argues, Palestinian diasporic filmmakers have a stronger connection to their homeland than other diasporic filmmakers ("Is there" 153-4). She goes on to claim that films made by directors functioning outside of the West Bank and Gaza have a much different "focus, perspective, and emphasis" than those made by directors still living in the Occupied Territories ("Is there" 154). While she raises good points concerning the diasporic filmmaker's position in the world and the difference between internal and external exilic Palestinian films—points that will help distinguish the Palestinian filmic accent from other pseudo-national cinemas and other accented cinemas—her objection to the aesthetic of some exilic filmmakers is less convincing. She claims that because many Palestinian exilic filmmakers have made homes in Europe, their films fit very well within the European art house aesthetic, not the accented cinema aesthetic ("Is there" 154). However, this tendency could be best explained by the situation of the directors as interstitial. In *Accented Cinema*, Naficy discusses the interstitial location of the directors claiming "it would be inaccurate to characterize accented filmmakers as marginal, as scholars are prone to do, for they do not live and work on the peripheries of society or the film and media industries. They are

situated inside and work in the interstices of both” (46). Given the interstitial location of the directors and their reliance on funding and distribution through European film festivals, it is neither surprising, nor a mark against their categorization as accented, that they are able to deftly conform to European aesthetics while also demonstrating quite a number of accented filmic trends as well. After all, a film’s accent is only partially a product of its particular aesthetics, and accented aesthetics are not entirely in contradiction to European art house (or any other established) aesthetics, per se. However, because of these important distinctions, any proposed definition of fictional Palestinian cinema will differ from simply defining a Palestinian accent within the films.

Because Naficy draws heavily from Arjun Appaduria and because the accent of a cinema or film can be an amorphous and unwieldy thing, I will borrow an analytical framework that Appadurai proposes in *Modernity at Large* to cover all the facets that go into a cinematic accent. Appadurai argues that the disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics, such as those that produce accented cinema, are best examined by looking at the relationships between five dimensions of global cultural flows: (a) ethnoscapas, which are landscapes of people including those in diaspora; (b) mediascapas, which are the distributions of electronic capabilities which provide access to large quantities of images to the world, (c) technoscapas, which are global configurations of technology and the speed with which it travels, (d) financescapas, which are the landscapes of the movements and exchange of global capital; and (e) ideoscapas, which are the political conglomerations of images, usually upholding national or state ideology, especially Enlightenment principles (33). These “-scapes” often overlap and are difficult to entirely separate from each other, so I will discuss several of them together. Because of the broad nature of the terms, a narrowed, context-centered definition of each will also be useful for the sake of

ease and clarity. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use ethnoscares to consider both the director's position in relation to his or her home and host country as well as in discussing the various audiences for which the film is intended. Because mediascares, which will involve a discussion of the films' availability to various audiences, will be relevant to the discussion of audience and access, I will discuss it with ethnoscares. Similarly, technoscares, the availability of and access to the equipment and technology necessary to create films, and financescares, both financing of the creation and distribution of the films as well as the money that the films bring in after they are shown or released, are intricately intertwined in any discussion of film and film production, so they will also be treated together. I will reserve ideoscares, for the most part, for a section of their own that treats Palestinian cinema as a whole, though it will be necessary to briefly touch on which ideologies are predominantly at play in the various directors' accents as well. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use ideoscares to mean the presentation of various ideologies within the films, usually presented through themes and tropes throughout the films. Some of the more significant ideoscares transcend the individual directors' work, so I will use a categorization based on time period of production in addressing the various ideologies at work in these films.

As Naficy points out, Palestinian cinema is both topically and structurally exilic ("Palestinian Exilic" 91); however, little work has been done to systematically identify what characteristics qualify a film as Palestinian. Scholars tend to assume a film belongs to a Palestinian cinema, without defining exactly what is meant by Palestinian cinema or films, such as Gertz and Khleifi, Ball, and Yaccub, or claim that there really is no such thing as Palestinian film industry and offer a tentative structure for examining a handful of films that are generally agreed to be "Palestinian," like Alexander ("Palestinians in Film" and "Is There"). This

dissertation will develop a working definition of Palestinian cinema by examining the accent of at six prominent directors—Michele Khleifi, Ali Nassar, Rashid Masharawi, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad, and Annemarie Jacir—and how those accents shape and form a cinema that is distinct from accented cinema in general and is specifically Palestinian. Each of these directors has produced more than one film that can be classified as Palestinian, and several of them made films over the course of several decades. In other words, they have each produced a body of work that will allow an examination of their individual accents across time and films. While there are problems inherent in the classification and categorization of films (Naficy *Accented* 19), the category this dissertation will develop will, by necessity and the nature of the theorist it draws upon, be more porous than more traditional film categories. It is not meant as a means of limiting or excluding the creative works of Palestinian directors, but of offering a definitive category for predominately scholarly purposes.

Only a handful of scholars have treated Palestinian cinema as a whole and offered distinctions between periods within it. While Gertz and Khleifi categorize all the previously mentioned directors and films as part of a fourth phase of Palestinian cinema, such a categorization is not particularly helpful for this project. Gertz and Khleifi are dealing with a much broader swath of films, in fact *all* of the Palestinian films they could find, than this dissertation is tackling. In the grand scheme of all Palestinian films, situating the films this dissertation treats as a single unit is probably a valid approach. However, within Gertz and Khleifi's grouping of fourth phase Palestinian films, a further break down of categories is necessary. Alexander categorizes the films in this period (during and after the 1980s) in relation

to the two *intifadas*¹, or uprisings (“Is there”). While such a distinction is useful to her analytical framework, in which she is using the films’ treatment of national issues as a defining element of Palestinian cinema, tying the categories of Palestinian films to armed struggle is problematic. Categorizing the films according to the national struggles taking place in the West Bank, and Gaza begs for a nationalist reading of the films in relation to those struggles, which is precisely what this dissertation is trying to avoid. Though these films undoubtedly are affected by and are connected to the goings-on in the West Bank, and Gaza, and those goings-on should be considered in any analysis and discussion of the films, they can and should be allowed to stand on their own as cinematic works, apart from a categorization that encourages a particular reading or restricts them to a limited context. While I acknowledge the relationship between Palestinian cinematic developments and the facts on the ground in Palestine, the lines for the various shifts in Palestinian fictional cinema do not fit well with categorizing them purely according to which uprising they happen to follow. *Wedding in Galilee* was actually filmed and release *before* the first *intifada*; only two of the films I will analyze were made during the first *intifada* and four were made between the two *intifadas*. The end date of the second *intifada*, which began in 2000, is a little murky, though most of the violence was subsiding by 2005. Five of the films I hope to analyze were made during that time period while nine were made after 2005. Given this spread of films and the fact that the films made between the *intifadas* deal less with the uprising itself and more with the consequences of the Oslo Accords that followed the uprising, using the *intifadas* as a demarcation is not the most productive approach for analyzing this set of films. When examining the spread of Palestinian fictional film apart from nationalist categories and

¹ The first *intifada* occurred from approximately 1987-1993, while the second *intifada* occurred from approximately 2000-2005.

movements, one can see a different set of trends based on the directors and the films themselves, rather than one based only on the goings on around the directors and films at the time of or directly before production.

Within this dissertation, the directors are categorized according to their most prolific or significant production periods. The first chapter will treat Michele Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, and Ali Nassar. Khleifi and Nassar produced most of their films in the late eighties and early nineties, and films like Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) and Nassar's *The Milky Way* (1997) were highly influential in carving out the general form of Palestinian fictional film. Rashid Masharawi is included in this category as well because his earliest films were also made in the nineties, though *Layla's Birthday* (2009) was made more recently. Though most of Nassar's work is also in the 2000s, *The Milky Way* (1997) is his most well-known and widely distributed film, and had more effect on Palestinian cinema than his later works. Its themes and aesthetics were also more clearly part of the earlier trends in Palestinian films. In many ways, these directors and their early works form the initial base of Palestinian fictional cinema. Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) is considered to be the first feature length Palestinian film and set the stage for subsequent work. Nassar and Masharawi were also early pioneers in the field who made significant contributions to an early cinema that relied mostly on collective experiences of occupation and displacement. Though all three have continued to make films into the 2000s and 2010s, their most significant contributions, up to this point, are their early films. Chapter one will examine Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* (1987), *Canticle of the Stones* (1990), *A Tale of Three Jewels* (1995), and *Zindeeq* (2009); Nassar's *The Milky Way* (1997), *In the 9th Month* (2002), and *Whispering Embers* (2008); and Masharawi's *Curfew* (1994), *Haifa* (1996), *Ticket to Jerusalem* (2002) and *Layla's Birthday* (2009). It will examine each director's particular style, as

demonstrated through his work, but will also look at how these directors approached creating and distributing these films and the impacts that such processes have on the individual accent of the filmmaker. Because these directors were pioneers in the field, finding funding for their films and production companies willing to work with them was particularly difficult. These difficulties as well as the differences in target audience as a result, are reflected in the quality and content of the films themselves.

The second chapter will treat three directors whose most significant works, or in some cases all of his or her works, were done in the early 2000s to the present: Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad, and Annemarie Jacir. While all four of these directors' most significant works were produced in the 2000s, the classification is not perfect. Elia Suleiman's trilogy extends from the 1996 to 2009; however, because *Divine Intervention* is perhaps the most well know of the three films, and *The Time that Remains* was released in 2009, I feel comfortable situating the series with the 2000s. *Chronicle of Disappearance* is also something of a marker for a significant shift in Palestinian films from a predominantly communal perspective to a more individual one. As such, it is best placed with the films that participate in and carry on that trend through the 2000s and 2010s. I will focus on Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996), *Divine Intervention* (2002), and *The Time that Remains* (2009); Abu Assad's *Rana's Wedding* (2002), *Paradise Now* (2005), and *Omar* (2013); and Jacir's *Salt of this Sea* (2008) and *When I Saw You* (2012). For the most part, these directors had the methods and success of Khleifi, Nassar, and Masharawi to build upon for their films. Though they often had to develop their own path to funding and technology based on which country they were working in at the time, obtaining funding and technical skill was somewhat easier, though still not easy, for the later directors as a result of the works of the earlier directors. These directors also benefitted from an increased ease of long

distance communication as well as the increased ease of movement of funds and technology as the result of technological advances in the '90s and early 2000s.

The vast majority of literature on Palestinian films, understandably, examines various tropes and themes within and across films, and it is these themes and trope which will be examined as ideoscapes and which are the focus of the fourth chapter. Because Palestinian films tend to be intricately tied to the political situation on the ground in the West Bank, and Gaza, they often reflect various ideologies that are in circulation amongst Palestinians in exile. Most of these ideologies center upon the desire to portray Palestinians as peaceful people under a siege of unwarranted, indiscriminant Israeli aggression against Palestinian culture, politics, and economics. Though many of the films accurately reflect the realities of life in Palestine, they still participate in the construction of narratives that support a very specific, ideological vision of Palestine and its people. Most of the directors live in exile, so I hesitate to say that the films reflect the ideologies of Palestinians who remain in the West Bank and Gaza. There is undoubtedly some overlap, but there are also important differences between the ideologies. While there are many common themes in fictional Palestinian cinema, this dissertation focuses on the ones that are most prominent and have the most relevance to helping to define a Palestinian fictional cinema such as road-blocks, cultural celebrations or activities, and exile and return. Several of these themes, including road blocks, weddings and other cultural events, and exile and return, have been written about at length by a handful of scholars, so I will build on their work in this section; however, I will also include a few themes that have not been dealt with extensively in the literature, including the lack of visual violence perpetrated by fictional characters and the inclusion of psychologically disturbed or physically damaged characters.

The presence and prevalence of roadblocks and the difficulties they create is a common source of analysis in the extant scholarship on Palestinian film and an important feature of the post-Oslo Palestinian political ideology. Gertz and Khleifi as well as Kay Dickenson discuss the presence of numerous roadblocks in Palestinian films at length and a number of other scholars mention them as part of their analyses. Gertz and Khleifi's book gives an overview of the development of Palestinian film, but then breaks down into chapters on individual directors as well as one on what they term "roadblock movies." The analysis of roadblocks in Palestinian films is frequently coupled with the analysis of how space is framed in the films, so both are discussed in this section. Roadblocks are frequently seen as a physical representation of the blocked space that Palestinians must deal with every day. Gertz and Khleifi note that after the Oslo Accords and the implementation of Israel's enclosure system, roadblocks become a central theme in films such as *Rana's Wedding* and *Divine Intervention* and figure in almost all Palestinian films made after 1993. Because roadblocks are a form of physically breaking up space, it will be helpful to also discuss the issues of space and claustrophobic scenes in this section. The inclusion of the roadblocks in Palestinian films participates in supporting the ideology of the Palestinian population as the victim of indiscriminant and arbitrary Israeli policies and as such highlights the resilience of the Palestinian people and the importance of resistance through *sumud*, or staying put. Average Palestinians are prevented from going to work, meeting romantic interests, or visiting friends and family, while Palestinians with more nefarious purposes slip through the roadblocks and around the walls with minimal difficulty. Though these are also very real problems that Palestinians encounter every day and which raise legitimate concerns over the role of Israel's security measures, references to and visual depictions of roadblocks have become a central support to the national narrative of victimhood.

These directors, however, also use the blocking of roads and spaces to open up spaces of resistance and opportunities for reclaiming some of that blocked space. In so doing, the films remind the viewer that Palestinians are the victims of Israeli violence, but that they are also capable of and desirous of reclaiming space and resisting the occupation.

Weddings also feature prominently in the scholarship of Palestinian films. Nadia Yaccub analyzes several cinematic weddings in a number of different Palestinian films. Rasha Salti also discusses actual weddings as well as symbolic weddings, such as that in *Paradise Now*, that never happen. While weddings themselves cannot be found in all Palestinian films, there are a number of films, *Rana's Wedding*, *Wedding in Galilee*, in which weddings are the primary goal of the characters. Rather than looking at weddings specifically as part of a Palestinian cinematic accent, I will treat weddings as part of a broader category of cultural traditions. Most Palestinian films reference the difficulties in performing routine celebrations or cultural traditions, the wedding being one of them. Weddings, funerals (martyr and non-martyr funerals), and birthdays all figure prominently in certain films. While the difficulty of performing any task is often a topic in Palestinian films, the focus on religious and cultural celebrations or occasions throws these daily difficulties into stark contrast. The presence and prevalence of cultural celebrations in Palestinian films participate in at least two ideological threads. The first thread is the same one that roadblock films support: Israel's occupation is unjust and prohibits Palestinians from performing important activities. The second thread addresses the problem of Palestinian cultural erasure and invisibility and works to solidify Palestinian cultural identity by emphasizing and, frequently, critiquing shared cultural traditions. Both threads are routinely utilized in Palestinian media and politics to bolster national consciousness and cultural solidarity.

The topic of exile and return is ubiquitous in Palestinian films. Haim Bersheeth has written extensively on this topic. His analysis examines the role of storytelling in reducing the melancholia produced from life in exile by allowing the director to tell his or her repressed story (“Telling”). Gertz and Khleifi take a slightly different, though overlapping in places, stance on the matter in their analysis of Elia Suleiman’s films. They claim that Suleiman occupies an ambivalent position between home and exile, modern and postmodern (*Palestinian Cinema* 186). Because most of the directors live in exile or diaspora, the conflict between those who stayed in the West Bank, and Gaza and those who left is a theme that is present in nearly every Palestinian film that this dissertation discusses. Sometimes the theme of exile and return is central, as in Elia Suleiman’s films and Khleifi’s *Zindeeq*, and other times it is peripheral, as in *Paradise Now* where Suha represents the returned exile or in *Curfew* where the exile is only represented through letters. This theme often shows itself in disputes between characters who have grown up in exile or who chose to immigrate and those who have spent their entire lives under occupation. While the right of return is a frequently mentioned problem in the political sphere surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the films’ focus on it is less on the right of all Palestinians to return to their homeland than on the consequences and conflicts that result when one leaves and subsequently returns. Thus, while this theme does touch on the political ideology of the right of return, it is more reflective of the position of the directors and attempts at formulating a home, rather than that of political entities, though both positions are present in my selection of films.

As with any literature or film about or surrounding military conflict, Palestinian films typically treat the topic of violence in some form or fashion. What is curious about Palestinian cinema’s treatment of violence, and telling of most directors’ political stance, is that violence perpetrated by the Palestinian characters is almost never visually displayed. This does not mean

that the Palestinian characters in the film do not commit violent acts—Said completes his suicide bombing mission, Omar participates in killing an IDF officer, Sulieman’s female ninja decimates a group of armed Israeli soldiers—but when they do, the directors employ a variety of tactics to mitigate, justify, or explain the violence and, more often than not, opt not to show the violent acts at all. Nouri Gana describes the absence of violence in *Paradise Now*—the termination of the film before viewers see the explosion from the bomb and its aftermath—as the collapse of the spectacle. The violence that is directly depicted usually takes the form of documentary footage of IDF soldiers beating or firing on Palestinians. Alexander notes this trend in what she terms “first intifada” films (“Is There” 161), but the trend continues throughout the cinema of Palestine. Though the topics of the films seem to increase in violence (suicide bombers, fighting ninjas, exploding peach pits, young resistance fighters), the actual violence on the screen does not increase much, if at all, in subsequent films. Through the various processes they use to justify or neutralize the violence on the screen, the directors of these films weave a delicate balance between supporting the ideological narrative of Palestinians as the victims of indiscriminant Israeli aggression, driven to violence by Israeli policies, and questioning the role of violent resistance. *Paradise Now* is the most explicit on this point, but most of the other films address these issues with varying degrees of directness as well.

Gertz and Khleifi discuss the effect of trauma on Palestinian film in the introduction to their book, but they predominantly use the term “trauma” in reference to the *Nakba*² and *Naksa*.³ They discuss trauma as it relates to the Palestinian narrative and its freezing of Palestinian history and artistic narration as well. In other words, they use the concept of trauma as it applies

² “the disaster” refers to the expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine in 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel.

³ “the setback” refers to the additional displacement of Palestinians following the 1967 June War and Israel’s seizing control of the West Bank and Gaza

to the national trauma that the Palestinian people have suffered, as a unit, not the trauma of individual experiences of the events of '48, '67, or the occupation. Bersheeth also mentions the melancholia that develops for Palestinian directors who have not, until recently, been allowed to tell their stories, but he discusses this in a very narrow range of films (only three) and within the genre of documentary, in which, I would argue, *Chronicle of Disappearance* is mis-categorized. While the Palestinian's national consciousness has undoubtedly suffered multiple traumas that affect how and if the Palestinian people tell their story, individual experiences of trauma also heavily impact Palestinian fictional films. The presence of individual, mental instability is a frequent theme in Palestinian film, though it varies significantly from film to film. Several films—*Haifa*, *The Milky Way*—include overtly mentally handicapped characters in the form of a “village idiot,”—characters that could be aptly described using Jameson's approach to Lacan's theory on postmodern schizophrenia. However, almost all of the films have characters who exhibit directly or specifically reference mental illness or instability. Some of these characters and references can also be described using the theory of postmodern schizophrenia, while others more accurately represent clinical mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, among others. Jameson's theory of postmodern schizophrenia from “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” will be useful as an overarching framework, as most of the films this dissertation treats participate in and are a product of postmodernism. However, there is an important distinction to be made between dealing with schizophrenia as a postmodern, cultural phenomenon and dealing with the actual psychological consequences of occupation that come up in several Palestinian films. While I recognize that some of the films intentionally and overtly use mental illness in a figurative and symbolic way, in which case Jameson's approach will prove helpful for analysis, others use mental health problems in an attempt to bring the realities

of the psychological damage of the occupation to light, often using less obvious depictions. These depictions are meant to be realistic and reflective of the actual psychological damage that Palestinians suffer as the result of their conditions in the West Bank, and Gaza as well as in exile. As such, using terminology that reflects the specific mental health problems that such characters suffer will be necessary as well. These two different depictions of mental health problems address two different ideological threads. The realistic depictions of the mentally and physically damaged predominantly reinforce the narrative of indiscriminant Palestinian victimization, while the symbolic characterizations of mental illness represent the loss and difficulty in recapturing a stable Palestinian identity.

After discussing the various characteristics that comprise each individual directors' filmic accent and analyzing the various ideoscapes across films, I will draw conclusions about any characteristics or tendencies they share and which may help to define a Palestinian fictional cinema. The fifth chapter, will draw together the information presented in chapters two, three, and four in order to present some conclusions about the ethnoscares, mediascape, technoscape, financescapes, and ideoscapes of these directors in order to develop a definition of Palestinian cinema. These conclusion will include some characteristics that are common to all accented cinema such as transnational funding and production, multiple and transnational audiences, and difficulties of distribution, but there are also characteristics that are unique to the Palestinian case such as the difficulty in appealing to the especially varied audiences that compose the Palestinian cinema's ethnoscape or the figurative and literal roadblocks to filming in the West Bank or Gaza—particularly getting personnel and equipment in and back out. These elements have direct effects on the content of the film. This chapter will focus on how these elements affect or lead to the development of certain trends in creating Palestinian films.

Ultimately the goal of this project, and its conclusion, is to develop a clear definition of a Palestinian fictional cinema. The definition of this cinema, rather than adhering to typical, nationalist definitions, must involve the transnational nature of Palestinian film financing, production, and distribution as well as the accent that such a transnational creative process produces in the films in terms of quality and content. As such, it is not a simple definition, and it requires enough flexibility to adapt to changes in Palestinian fictional cinema as they develop.

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Chapter Two: Early Audiences and Technology: Khleifi, Masharawi, and Nassar

Until the late 1980s, almost all Palestinian film was documentary in style and overtly political in nature. Gertz and Khleifi provide an excellent timeline of the development of Palestinian film in their book, in which they trace the origins of Palestinian film from its birth as politically sponsored propaganda, through a period of virtually no film production, and into its current incarnation which includes documentary and fictional films as well as a number of films that blend both techniques. While Palestinian documentary film has a long history filled with stops, starts and mysterious disappearances, feature film only grasped a foothold in the area in 1987 when Michel Khleifi created *Wedding in Galilee*. However, because of the first *intifada* (uprising), he was alone in his ventures until Rashid Masharawi began making feature films in 1994 and Elia Suleiman and Ali Nasser began their feature film careers in 1996 and 1997 respectively. Though Khleifi, Masharawi, and Nassar all continued to make films into the 2000s, their early work as pioneers in the field forms a base from which subsequent works can be analyzed.

Though I will be analyzing all three directors' bodies of work individually, there are certain characteristics that they share, some of which are also shared by other Palestinian filmmakers and other accented filmmakers in general. In terms of what Appadurai calls "financescapes," all Palestinian directors who create fictional film must scrabble together funding from a variety of sources, usually from a combination of European countries and organizations with various conditions and motivations, though at least two recent fictional films have been made entirely with funds from Palestinian sources. These funding sources are often different for each film, though each director almost always relies on organizations within his or her host country for at least partial funding of his or her projects. Michel Khleifi, for example,

almost always draws on at least one or two Belgian and French sources. Similarly, distribution and reaching any, much less a target, audience is often difficult for Palestinian filmmakers in general. Most of the films I treat participate in international film festival circuits for exposure to a wider audience, but they are often distributed, if they distributed at all, through European television stations or smaller, local distribution centers such as Arab Film Distribution in the US. Distribution is often closely linked to funding as television stations and other distribution channels will often buy the rights for distribution before the film is made, giving the directors additional funding with which to complete their projects. I will use a translocal approach, as detailed by Darling-Wolf, to examine the relationship that forms between certain directors and certain localities for funding as well as audience. In doing so, I trace specific movements of funds and films in the global market place and how those movements potentially affect the content of the films themselves.

Michel Khleifi: Film and Funding Pioneer

Michel Khleifi is perhaps the most written about of Palestinian filmmakers, though Hany Abu Assad and Elia Suleiman are not far behind. Khleifi was born in Nazareth in 1950 to Arab, Christian parents and moved to Belgium in 1970 where he was educated in film at Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle (INSAS) (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 37). It is between these two points, Belgium and Palestine, that Khleifi's hybridity is situated, his global-local-national nexus in Darling-Wolf's terms, and the presence of both locations is heavily felt in all of his fictional film. In 1970, upon his departure from Nazareth, Khleifi carried both emotional and physical marks of his life in Israel. Gertz and Khleifi explain that the month Khleifi was to leave for Europe was Black September, the month that Gamal Abdel Nasser died.

Khleifi went to East Jerusalem and bought a poster of the Egyptian President while there, but during his return trip to Nazareth, he was stopped and searched while changing buses, and the police found the Nasser poster. The officer proceeded to beat him mercilessly in front of a crowd of cheering Jewish boys who were about his age. When he flew to Europe, he still had the marks and bruises from the beating (*Palestinian* 37). However, Khleifi, like many exiles, did not forget his home or the culture form which he came upon arrival in Europe. In Brussels, he did not seek segregation or assimilation, but synthesis with his new host culture. When speaking of his and Omar al-Qattan's time in Belgium, Khleifi states:

So it seemed to us that in order to safeguard our own culture, we would have to engage with other cultures, especially the dominant European culture. The problem was how not to melt away into European culture, while at the same time enriching ourselves, in order to communicate with this culture. [...] We shouldn't try to imitate, to make films that are similar but better than the most advanced in Europe and elsewhere. There has to be a cultural confrontation which will produce a new synthesis. (Khleifi "Homeland" 19)

It is precisely this synthesis that his films create as he uses the knowledge and technical and aesthetic training he acquired in Brussels to make films about his homeland in Palestine. In the same interview, he also describes the benefits of Belgium, in particular, for foreign students: "Brussels offered us [he and al-Qattan] the opportunity of exchange with the Belgians and with Europe, something which was much more difficult in big cities like Paris or London, where cultural activity is so overwhelming that as foreign students we would have been crushed" (Khleifi "Homelands" 19). The synthesis that he underwent as a student and new immigrant is clearly reflected in his works that are predominantly fictional, which tend to blend European art house aesthetics with gritty, documentary footage. While studying in Brussels, Khleifi developed an approach to and theory about cinema that helped bridge the gaps between his home and host countries. In both his interview in *Afterimage* as well as that in *Sight and Sound*, Khleifi

mentions a “cinema of the poor” by which he means the process of creating rich films with few resources (14 and 19). Whether by choice or by necessity, most of Khleifi’s films have relatively small budgets, though *Wedding in Galilee* had a rather large budget compared to similar films of the time, and yet manage to project rich filmic quality, much of which is created through lighting and technique rather than expensive special effects or pyrotechnics.

Because Belgium is a significant location for Khleifi personally as well as professionally, all of his films received funds or other means of technical support from Belgian institutions. Because of Belgium’s physical location and close relationship with France, Khleifi also often draws on French funding and means of technical support. Khleifi’s close friendship and business relationship with Omar al-Qattan allowed Khleifi to also take advantage of British funding for several of his later films. Belgium and Palestine/Israel create what Darling-Wolf would call a global-national-local nexus (22) for Khleifi’s work, but France and the UK are also significant regions of influence. Though Spanish and German television stations are also key sources of funds and technology for some of his films, Khleifi, himself, seems to operate most regularly and most fluidly between Belgium and Palestine/Israel with occasional forays into France and England for funding and distribution resources. In terms of audience, one can generalize that all of his films were made for a ‘highbrow,’ European film culture such as that in France. Khleifi’s aesthetic draws heavily on classical lighting and compositions that are popular in European art-film industries, which is not surprising given his extensive training in Brussels. Although Khleifi may have hoped his films would reach audiences in the Occupied Territories, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza only had limited access to most of his films because of the weak distribution channels in the Occupied Territories. Though all of his films bear his distinctive style, that style is employed to different ends in each one. Analyzing each of his four

feature length, predominantly fictional, films in terms of specific finance- and technoscapes, ethno- and mediascapes, as well as specific themes or ideologies at play will further enlighten the way in which these global flows of people, technology and money move within and around Khleifi's global-national-local nexus of Belgium and Palestine and how those movements affect the content of the films themselves and Khleifi cinematic accent.

Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* (1987) is generally agreed to be the first Palestinian feature film and, according to Omar al-Qattan who worked with Khleifi on the film, set a precedent for the transfer of resources from Europe to Palestinian film projects (114). Because of the film's success and popularity and Khleifi and al-Qattan's willingness to discuss the project in a variety of interviews, financial and technical information on *Wedding in Galilee* is easier to find than that of most Palestinian films, and one can see the difficulty with which Palestinian feature film came into being. Though the PLO initially offered to help financially with *Wedding in Galilee*, they did not, in the end, offer any monetary assistance (al-Qattan 113), so the vast majority of funds came from European countries—Belgium and France in particular. In one interview, Khleifi recounts that

at the beginning people didn't want to get involved. [...] In Belgium, they resisted for eight months over whether to sign. [...] I had to make grand declarations of humanism, straight out of the eighteenth century, to justify the project. No one could stop us from expressing ourselves. The problem is that film is expensive and you need money. We have a great deal more difficulty getting the money from Arab countries than in Europe, you see. It's the representation of Palestine that is forbidden. Everyone else can represent Palestine but us. Little by little, we are taking things into our own hands. (Khleifi "Allegories" 14)

The fact that Khleifi had to justify his project in terms of "grand declarations of humanism" reflects the ideological and Western philosophical issues that Palestinian filmmakers almost always have to consider and make concessions to in order to obtain funding. The dependence of European funding on principles of Western humanism and Western politics, in which Israelis are

often seen as more human than Palestinians, dictates that only films that also adhere to, or at least do not openly contradict, that philosophy are made. Khleifi, through his comparably privileged position as an exile who is familiar with the particular type of humanism and politics at play in Europe, was able to convince his potential funders that his film adhered to those principles and thus secured enough funds to begin the project. While all filmmakers must convince their funders of the quality and potential success of their film projects to some degree, the importance of being able to navigate between Western impressions of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict (and the Arab world in general) and the desire to represent a reality that at least somewhat contradicts those Western impressions is unique to Palestinian directors and other stateless accented filmmakers whose lived experiences do not comport with Western impressions of their people and lives.

Khleifi's films represent the lived experiences of Palestinians under Israeli control, whether in Israel or the Occupied Territories, but do not, in general, greatly offend European humanist sensibilities or politics, so he was able to secure European funding after some coaxing. Khleifi Received 1,600,000 Francs from the Centre Nationale de la Cinematographie (CNC) in France as a production advance with the requirement that the film be produced in France and 175,000 francs in distribution assistance and direct payments to film laboratories for prints. In addition to these specific sums, Khleifi mentions that he also received financial assistance from the Ministry of the French Community in Belgium and from the Belgian business community as well as private capital from TV and film agencies in Belgium, France (Cannal Plus), Britain, and Germany (ZDF) (Khleifi "From Reality to Fiction" 92-3). The contributions from these sources and heavy financial investment from his own pocket, however, still left Khleifi with a gap in his funding. This budgetary gap was closed by Omar al-Qattan's wealthy relatives, his father and

uncle, who were successful contactors in Kuwait (al-Qattan 113). Khleifi was so successful at raising funds for this film that, Omar al-Qattan points out, the high cost and budget threatened Khleifi's ideas of "cinema of the poor," but, ultimately, the film managed to adhere to those principles because of Khleifi's rigorous aesthetic program (114). Because he filmed *Wedding in Galilee* before the outbreak of the first *intifada*, Khleifi and his crew enjoyed a fluidity of movement between locations and across the borders that became impossible within a year after finishing the film. He used five different villages, three in Galilee and two in the West Bank, to create the village in the film (Shohat 46) and even had a handful of Israelis working on the set with them in the West Bank. Al-Qattan reflects that they did not have any real trouble from the Israeli military presence during filming, other than a group of thugs harassing them. All of this changed after the *intifada* (115), which can be seen in Khleifi's subsequent films, but for *Wedding in Galilee*, the fluidity of movement of funds, equipment, and personnel was relatively unhampered by the Israeli Occupation. In terms of what effects such relative freedom of movement had on the film itself, it can be assumed that Khleifi was able to more or less film what and how he wanted to film. The content was not restricted, as *The Tale of Three Jewels* would be; the filming locations were relatively safe and stable, unlike Hany Abu Assad's in *Paradise Now*; and personnel could be trained and travel with the film crew for the entirety of filming, unlike with Annemarie Jacir's *Salt of this Sea* or Rashid Masharawi's films.

In terms of distribution and access, *Wedding in Galilee* enjoyed the widest distribution and the greatest ease of access of any of Khleifi's films. Though his primary audience was, perhaps, European film festival audiences, *Wedding in Galilee* was shown in the Arab world as well. Given its critique of Israeli control in the region and of Palestinian society, it is difficult to imagine that Khleifi did not also intend for Palestinians to be a primary audience; however, as

previously mentioned, distribution channels in the West Bank and Gaza are limited and *Wedding in Galilee* was released during the first *intifada*. As a result of the fighting, *Wedding in Galilee* was not screened in the West Bank, or Gaza, but it was shown in Nazareth and has been available to Palestinians living in Israel (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 39). Those Palestinians and Arabs who were able to view the films had mixed reviews. While the film was generally positively received, it sparked a debate amongst its critics over its seeming suggestion of unqualified coexistence with Israel, its display of ignorance and backwardness in traditional Palestinian societies, and for otherwise not being harsh enough in its depictions of Israel and the Occupation (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 38-9). In the Western world, however, *Wedding in Galilee* was received with various awards and praises with very little negative critique (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 38). This mixed reception and the differences in criticism between European audiences and Arab audiences is an indicator of the particular hybridity under which Khleifi finds himself operating. Khleifi, in order to get funding and distribution in the West, created a film that did not greatly contradict European sensibilities and conformed quite well to stylistic expectations of an independent art house film. As an exile who is not experiencing the exigencies of daily occupation or the injustices of 3rd class citizenry as a Palestinian in Israel, he is willing to create a film that is less urgent, though no less poignant, than later filmmakers like Masharawi, who spent most of his adult life living under Israeli occupation.

Canticle of the Stones, Khleifi's second feature film, was filmed during the first *intifada* in 1990, which presented a number of obstacles to the creation and distribution of the film. Despite the difficulties of the *intifada* in the early 1990s, the '90s brought new sources of income to the cultural scene in the West Bank and Gaza due, at least in part, to the visibility of the *intifada* and the supposed 'success' of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Massad points out that "the

flooding of the West Bank and Gaza with internationally funded NGOs and the availability of new US and European money, as well as funding from the Palestinian business community, for different types of cultural projects, including films, changed the filmic terrain drastically" (37-8). *Canticle of the Stones* is one of only two feature length fictional (at least in part) films made in the West Bank or Gaza during the *intifada*, so it did not benefit from the post-Oslo flooding of funds, but it most likely benefitted, at least in part, from the new visibility of the conflict and the sense of urgency that the first *intifada* brought to the West. Unlike *Wedding in Galilee*, *Canticle of the Stones* was made using funds primarily from television stations including Britain's Channel Four, Germany's Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), and Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF) as well as Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles (CBA) and Sourat Films, Khleifi's own company. Because *Canticle of the Stones* was not covered as thoroughly as some of Khleifi's other films in the literature, details about filming and funding is sparse, but the Belgian influence is still present in addition to the television funding.

Distribution for *Canticle of the Stones*, though seemingly simplified through the involvement of television stations, was not as immediate as expected. *Canticle of the Stones* was filmed and released during the first *intifada*, an event that the film treats explicitly. Despite having a time-sensitive topic, Al-Qattan explains, Britain's Channel Four, who bought the rights to show the film and received a completed copy in 1990, did not broadcast it until 1992. Though al-Qattan claims this was likely the result of politics (117), Khleifi points out another possible reason for the delay in distribution:

In *Canticle of the Stones*, for example, I combined two very different forms: an extremely stylized fictional style and reportage. This meant that the programmers didn't know which slot to put it in—this is what I mean by subverting television. (Khleifi and al-Qattan 21)

Regardless of the reasons, the delay and eventual placement in a traditionally low viewing time slot, midnight, undoubtedly hampered the film's availability to audiences in England. However, the film did make the film festival circuits, winning the Special Jury Prize at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan in 1991, so it did, at least, reach film festival audiences in a manner similar to *Wedding in Galilee*. Any remaining movie theaters in the West Bank and Gaza were closed or destroyed during the *intifada* and travel, imports, and exports were heavily restricted, making access to that particular audience quite difficult at the time of the film's release⁴.

Despite the flooding of the Occupied Territories with NGO money after the Oslo Accords, *The Tale of Three Jewels*, made in 1995, encountered a new set of financial roadblocks on its way to creation. According Omar al-Qattan, obtaining funding for films after Oslo, but before the second *intifada* was only relatively easy if the films propagated the idea of peace in the region, regardless of the realities on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza (123). However, Khleifi was eventually able to secure funding for the film, again predominantly through television channels. The film itself was commissioned by BBC and One World Group of Broadcasters (al-Qattan 123), a British organization, and Televisión Española (Gertz and Khleifi "Tale of the Three" 215), a Spanish television channel. In addition to these primary sources of funding, Khleifi also obtained money or equipment from British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); the Foundation Montecinema Verità, a Swiss company; La Sept-Arte, a French company; Television Trust for the Environment, which is an international group composed of Britain's Central Television, the UN Environmental Programme, and the World Wildlife Fund; as well as both of his and Omar al-Qattan's companies, Sindibad Films (UK) and Sourat Films

⁴ I was unable to find information about whether or not the film was shown in Israel in the early 1990s.

(Belgium). One of the reason for the increased British presence in the funding and production of Khleifi's films can be attributed to his close friendship and working relationship with Omar al-Qattan, who also worked on many of these films with Khleifi—he was the Associate Producer for *Canticle of the Stones* and the Executive Produce for *The Tale of Three Jewels* (“Omar al-Qattan”) and *Zindeeq*. In 1991, al-Qattan settled in England and opened Sourat Films UK, which eventually became Sindibad Films Ltd, and began to recruit more British funding for his and Khleifi's projects. In this way, though England is more central to al-Qattan's hybrid identity—al-Qattan having attended primary school and university in England—England also becomes an important access point for funding and distribution for Khleifi through his friendship and working relationship with al-Qattan. This is at least one example, though I'm sure there are many others, of how the global movement of peoples in exile can create networks and relationships to produce new cultural material from and about their homelands.

Actually filming *The Tale of Three Jewels* also presented a number of obstacles for Khleifi and his team. The film was shot on location in Gaza over the course of nine weeks. The script itself was written in fifteen days (al-Qattan 123) and the filming conditions, difficult to begin with, were made even more difficult by the Israeli occupation forces as well as the Hebron Massacre, which occurred on their second day of filming (Khleifi qtd. in Gertz and Khleifi "Tale of the Three" 209) and prompted protests, curfews, and closures throughout the area. Unlike *Wedding in Galilee* or *Canticle of the Stones*, the script for *The Tale of Three Jewels* had to be submitted to the Israeli army from the start, and the army forbade them from using any weapons during filming or filming any scenes that looked like demonstrations. As a result, Khleifi was forced to shoot some scenes differently than he preferred, though he circumvented the Israeli rules on occasion in the interest of preserving his artistic vision. He claims, "we filmed one scene

with weapons anyway, when the four young men are killed, and we had to 'steal' the images; that is why the camera in that scene is running" (Khleifi qtd. in Gertz and Khleifi "Tale of the Three" 209-10). Despite a willingness to thwart Israeli demands for the sake of the film, those demands and restrictions do have a tangible effect on the film itself. In the scene that Khleifi discusses in the above quote, for example, the camera is jostled and moving, which is not typical of Khleifi's style for his fictional films. The scenes in his fictional films are usually meticulously constructed with the actors carefully placed and lighted. Though the documentary footage that is sometimes incorporated into his fictional films is rougher, Khleifi's general style in his fictional films is stable, soft, and lyrical. The "stolen" images contrast with the style of the rest of the film, though they do not greatly detract from the overall effect of the film and are necessary to the plot line.

Khleifi and his crew also experienced filming difficulties as the result of the Hebron Massacre, Baruch Goldstein's murder of 29 Palestinians and injury of 125 others as they prayed in the Ibrahimi Mosque, and the subsequent protests and riots. According to Khleifi, filming had to stop for three weeks after the massacre and the project was almost abandoned entirely. In the end, however, he decided to move forward with filming, despite the difficult conditions. When speaking of making *The Tale of Three Jewels*, Khleifi recounts that "just to travel 2 or 3 miles was an adventure. Little by little we decided to stay and make the film in Gaza because it could be made ONLY in Gaza. By then we were considered mad and known by the locals as 'The Fools'" (Gertz and Khleifi "Tale of the Three" 209). Mobility and safety concerns were not the only technical problems Khleifi encountered in Gaza. Casting, never an easy task in the West Bank and Gaza, was particularly difficult for the role of Yusef. They auditioned over 200 children for the part before accidentally stumbling across Muhammad al-Nahhal in an auto repair shop. Though al-Nahhal was Khleifi's choice for the character, the boy was not a trained actor

and was suffering from at least two significant traumas that, according to Khleifi, left al-Nahhal “close to a state of autism” in which he had forgotten how to read and write (Khleifi “On the Right” 31).

Like *Canticle of the Stones*, *The Tale of Three Jewels* was produced with funding from television, giving it access to a ready-made distribution network via the BBC. However, the topic of Gaza’s suffering children was at odds with the politically popular narrative of peace in Palestine/Israel after the 1993 Oslo Accords, and al-Qattan blames this contrast for its lack-luster reception at film festivals like Cannes in 1995 and its rejection from the London Film Festival, despite its position as the first Palestinian-British co-production of a feature film (124). While it continued to be shown on the film festival circuits and was distributed on VHS in England, it was only shown in the UK in a reduced format on BBC 2 (125).

Zindeeq, Khleifi’s most recent fictional film was made almost fourteen years after *The Tale of Three Jewels*. Though Khleifi continued to make films during this period, they were predominantly documentary and his film, *Route 181*, with Eyal Sivan was not politically popular, which may have led to some difficulties finding funding and support for subsequent films. While *Zindeeq* is typically listed as a Palestine, UK, Belgian, and UAE co-production (al-Qattan and Khleifi), it received more support and funding from the Arab world than any of Khleifi’s other fictional film projects. The sources of funding and equipment from the UK and Belgium were from Sindibad and Sourat films, Khleifi and al-Qattan’s companies, respectively. Both companies, despite being based in and incorporated into film industries in Britain and Belgium, primarily fund and equip film projects for the Arab world with a heavy emphasis on Khleifi’s and al-Qattan’s work specifically, so the British and Belgian influence, while still present, is reduced in this film because it was not produced to satisfy a television audience in a European

country. It also likely lacked the potential pressures of satisfying the political sensibilities of European companies. However, *Zindeeq* was not terribly well received. Though a number of critiques commend the style and quality of the film, the general consensus seems to be that the lack of distinction between fantasy and reality made the film too difficult to follow in places. Murphy, for example, proclaims that “the lack of distinct contrast between the different types of sequences” are confusing for the viewer. Similarly, Simon claims that *Zindeeq* is “difficult to follow and exhausting to watch because the visual style doesn’t differentiate between the protagon[onist]’s current reality and what is happening in his head.”

In terms of style and thematics, Khleifi’s films have a marked, lyrical style and a handful of themes that are prominent throughout his fictional films and which contribute to his filmic accent. Though many sources briefly mention the lyricism of Khleifi’s films, none discuss the techniques he uses to create it or the influences that contribute to those choices. In general, Khleifi’s individual style in his fictional films depends heavily upon classically composed shots, high contrast lighting, minimal noise, and strategic use of documentary footage to create jarring contrasts. Khleifi’s use of heavily stylized composition and lighting is most easily seen during in-door scenes in his films. *Wedding in Galilee* and *Canticle of the Stones*, both of which involve many important scenes within rooms or buildings, are the best example of this technique. In *Wedding in Galilee*, the scenes of Adel and Samia attempting to consummate their marriage provide the best example of Khleifi’s use of lighting, sound, and composition. The couple are dressed in white, in a white room that contains a white bed. The camera is stable and its movements are smooth. The lighting is low, ostensibly from candles, which, combined with the white, produce heavy shadows at times, creating a generally soft and somber mood. Samia is the active character in these scenes, while Adel is predominantly still. The camera is usually focused



Figure 1: Low lighting creates high contrast on the characters' faces and white clothing. (*Wedding in Galilee*)



Figure 2: Samia appears in the foreground of most shots with partial images of Adel in the background. (*Wedding in Galilee*)

on Samia's activity—she appears in the forefront of most shots and generally takes up more room in each frame than Adel. When Adel does appear in the forefront of a shot, he is usually only partially shown, while Samia's full body moves through the background. The scenes are silent with the exception of the sparse dialogue, the rustling of fabric, and a few other small noises as the characters move about. The silence particularly heightens the tensions between the two would-be lovers. The softness of these scenes is contrasted by the scenes of the boisterous party going on outside of the house.

While *Wedding in Galilee* does involve some contrasting scenes, Khliefi uses that particular technique more heavily in *Canticle of the Stone*. In *Canticle of the Stones*, Khleifi weaves a fictional tale about two reunited lovers with documentary footage of the first *intifada*. The contrast between the two types of footage is stark and jarring. The footage of the couple is



Figure 3: Adel's partial body in the foreground while Samia's whole form moves freely in the background. (*Wedding in Galilee*)

reminiscent of that of the couple in *Wedding in Galilee*—stable images of carefully posed actors and actresses under high contrast lighting with very little noise or sound. The documentary footage spliced between the scenes of the lovers in *Canticle of the Stones*, however, is loud and chaotic. The people in the footage are usually speaking, quickly and loudly, over the noises of the street, wind, sirens and, sometimes, gun shots. The camera is jostled and the images and their composition are rough. Though *Canticle of the Stones* exemplifies this element of Khleifi's style and is the film in which he uses this technique the most, he uses similarly jarring and contrasting images in at least a few places in all of his predominantly fictional films: the scenes when the four boys are murdered and the scene of the protests in *A Tale of Three Jewels*; the party scenes and scenes of the governor's departure in *Wedding in Galilee*; and the scenes of clips of the protagonist's documentary footage in *Zindeeq*, to name a few. The reasons Khleifi uses a blend



Figure 4: High contrast lighting of actors in *Canticle of the Stones* (*Canticle of the Stones*)

of fiction and documentary footage in his films, a characteristic that forms a substantial part of his particular filmic accent, are tied to both his dedication to a cinema of the poor as well as his belief in a lack of distinction between documentary and fictional filmmaking in general. Khleifi's dedication to a cinema of the poor, or rich, beautiful films made on a small budget and with few resources, is what produces the lyricism in his fictional films. The richness of these films derives from his drawing upon natural beauty, both in the surroundings and the characters, and using lighting, sound, and scene composition to enhance that beauty. However, Khleifi also studied journalism and documentary filmmaking at INSAS and in the process, developed the belief that fictional film and documentary film share much in common. When speaking of documentary and fictional film, Khleifi goes so far as to claim that "Obviously, you cannot separate one from the other. I have the impression that creation plays between the possible—the real—and the



Figure 5: Documentary footage of a family salvaging what they can from their home before it is demolished by Israeli soldiers (*Canticle of the Stones*).

impossible, or fiction” (Khleifi “An Interview” 15). As a result of this belief, his films trouble the boundary between reality and fiction, or fantasy, whenever they can. When asked whether Yousef was a “real” character, Khleifi replied “Like all characters, like all of us, he is real and unreal” (“On the Right” 31). In the same interview, he goes on to discuss the ways in which Yousef is a fictional character, but one that also incorporates some of al-Nahhal’s actual traits, such as his love of birds (15). His approach to blurring the lines between documentary and fiction in most of his films is subtle, the point being that the spectator cannot necessarily tell what is real and what is fiction. The contrast is more marked in *Canticle of the Stones* than in his other films, and the boundary breaks down almost entirely in *Zindeeq*. Though Elia Suleiman also blurs the line between reality and fiction in his films, the method through which Khleifi achieves the effect is quite different from Suleiman, who uses a combination of biography and absurdist fantasy to blur reality and fiction. For Suleiman, the spaces of reality and fiction are clearly demarcated, but the edges where the two meet are blurred. For, Khleifi, the two spaces are not distinct; reality can be pulled into fiction and fiction into reality, often unbeknownst to the spectator.

Because of this belief and this practice in writing and creating his films, the theme of reality and fantasy, or dreams and reality, appears in all of Khleifi’s fictional films. Perhaps the most overt example of Khleifi’s treatment of dreams and reality is in *A Tale of Three Jewels*. Yousef is a dreamer who hatches a fantastical plan to travel to America via orange crate to find the three lost jewels from Aida’s grandmother’s necklace. The film opens with a dream that recurs in different forms throughout and which become critical at the end of film when Yousef is shot. He is miraculously saved through his dream, which is also the means by which he acquires the three lost jewels. Yousef and Aida both have difficulty determining the difference between

fiction and fact when it comes to their tales and stories, a characteristic that is easily attributable to their youth but that is also attributable to Khleifi's belief that the boundary between fact and fiction is tenuous.

Khleifi treats a handful of other themes that are particular to his accent and style, ones that other Palestinian directors tend to omit or downplay. Perhaps the most obvious theme that is more prominent in Khleifi's work than in other Palestinian directors' films is the emphasis on women and children as occupying the bottom rung on the ladder of oppression (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 86). He is concerned with oppression in general, as are most Palestinian films, but in his work, he goes beyond the obvious oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli and also includes, sometimes even emphasizes, the oppression of children and women by traditional Palestinian society. All of his fictional films incorporate at least one archaic Palestinian tradition that Khleifi critiques. In *Wedding in Galilee*, his focus is on the traditional requirement and proof of the bride's virginity; in *Canticle of the Stones*, he focuses on the potentially violent retribution of male family members against female family members who transgress sexual boundaries; in *A Tale of Three Jewels*, he emphasizes the plight of Yousef's mother and sister who must sacrifice to keep the household running while the adult men are in prison or fighting; and in *Zindeeq*, he addresses blood feuds that put entire families in danger. Three of the four of these cultural practices are specifically oppressive to women and the third, the blood feuds, is not of no consequence to them. This internal critique also sets up a contrasting binary between archaic tradition and modernity, though this theme is not as pronounced in Khleifi's work as in other directors' works such as Hanna Elias's *The Olive Harvest* (2003).

Rashid Masharawi: Grit and Productivity

Though less well known than Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi also created a handful of significant films during the mid-nineties and has continued to make films into the 2000s, his most recent fictional feature film being *Palestine Stereo* (2013). Though one of the lesser known Palestinian filmmakers, Masharawi is one of the most prolific⁵. Masharawi was born in 1962 and spent most of his childhood in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza. Though he left Gaza at the age of twelve in order to find work in Israel to help his family (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 42), his experiences in the refugee camp have greatly contributed to both the content and thematics of his work. Unlike the other directors in this paper, Masharawi was predominantly self-taught and, until fairly recently, spent almost his entire life in Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza. From 1993 to 1996, Masharawi lived in the Netherlands where he and Hany Abu-Assad created the Ayloul production company. Because of his insistence on remaining in the Occupied Territories, Masharawi's global-local-national-nexus is more skewed towards the local than the other directors in this dissertation, but his experiences with and continued use of resources from the Netherlands and other European countries means his films also draw upon the global for their creation and distribution. He was forced to relocate to Paris in 2002, after the Israeli government tried to force him to leave Ramallah, where he had been living for almost ten years, and return to Gaza. Though he draws on funding and technology from France, the US, and Canada semi-regularly, his primary geographical location for European funding, equipment, and technicians is

⁵ However, perhaps because of his less well known status on the international film stage, his films can be quite difficult to find and view—a problem I have run into while researching this paper. Of his six full length feature fictional films, I have only been able to obtain copies of or view four: *Curfew* (1994), *Haifa* (1996), *A Ticket to Jerusalem* (2002), and *Layla's Birthday* (2008). *Waiting* (2005) and *Palestine Stereo* (2013) have thus far eluded my grasp. Because his films are more difficult to find, there is not as much information available about their production, distribution, and reception, though there is some. *Curfew* and *Haifa*, in particular, have been written about the least, making acquiring adequate information about them more difficult.

the Netherlands, making his global-national-local nexus primarily between the West Bank and New Amsterdam.

Masharawi's first feature film, *Curfew*, has a rather short list of production companies compared to most Palestinian films. The film was technically a Dutch production with Masharawi and Abu-Assad's production company partnering with Argus Film Produktie to create the film. The process of filming *Curfew*, like most other Palestinian films, was somewhat harried. Masharawi, unlike some of the other directors, however, seems to be more than willing to circumvent or out-right defy Israel and its military presence in the West Bank and Gaza in order to complete his films. *Curfew* was at least partially filmed during the first *intifada*, presenting Masharawi with a variety of challenges to overcome, the most significant of which was likely the fact that filming was not allowed in Gaza at the time. Because of this impediment, the bulk of the film was made in the Jenin refugee camp and Nazareth. However, Masharawi and his crew managed to steal a few wide shots of Gaza (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 104) to be used as grounding shots within the film. Ironically, much of *Curfew* was filmed under an actual curfew. Masharawi tells Fareed Armaly that it was only with the help of women that he was able to film under the military curfew because only women are allowed to leave the homes every few days to buy provisions ("An Interview"). Masharawi tells Armaly "I was filming *Curfew* often outside during curfew by working alongside women. They served as lookouts to give me enough time to hide if they see any army coming. My mother would help as well, often hiding the videotapes on her as she shopped, or under vegetables and fruit" ("An Interview"). Such restrictions undoubtedly had an effect on the content of the film. The difficulty of filming outside and the impossibility of filming much in Gaza itself almost certainly contributed, whether intentionally or not, to the claustrophobia of the film .

Though *Curfew* won a few awards on the film festival circuit, it was not widely distributed and is therefore, rather difficult to find. Based on my experiences, I think it is safe to say that its current audience is limited. It was carried briefly on Netflix in the United States, where I was able to watch it, and has been shown at film festivals throughout the world. Its audience now, is probably predominantly academics. In an interview with MF Galaxy Radio, Masharawi discusses the difficulty of making films that represent the Palestinian side of events in a media environment that is dominated by the Israeli narrative. He claims that being in competition with Israeli media, which has more money and a larger global presence, is very difficult (“Rashid Masharawi”). Though he never makes the claim himself, it is possible that *Curfew* and *Haifa* may have suffered a similar fate to Khleifi’s *Tale of Three Jewels*, which al-Qattan claimed was not as well received or distributed as it could have been because it demonstrated the failures of the peace process at a time when the Oslo Accords were popular.

Masharawi’s subsequent feature film, *Haifa*, though perhaps easier to film because of the relative quiet after Oslo, did not fare much better with distribution. *Haifa* was a coproduction between Parev Production, which operates from Paris, Argus Film Produktie, and Ayloul. Despite being only slightly easier to find than *Curfew*, information on the technical filming aspect of *Haifa* is scarce. It was filmed on location in Jericho in the West Bank, so was most likely filmed in the Aqabat Jaber. Because this film was made during a relatively calm time in Palestinian history (between *intifadas*) movement and filming was likely easier than filming *Curfew*. As previously mentioned, *Haifa* was only slightly easier to find than *Curfew*. It too appeared on *Netflix* briefly before disappearing again into the ether. Like *Curfew*, *Haifa* also enjoyed a good reception on the film festival circuit and its screening at the Cannes International film festival was the first time Cannes acknowledged Palestine directly. Also like *Curfew*, it is

most likely safe to assume that *Haifa*'s current audience is limited to a fairly small number of academics, and I was unable to discover if it was ever able to reach an audience in the West Bank⁶.

Ticket to Jerusalem (2002) and *Layla's Birthday* (2009) were both distributed more widely and were somewhat easier to find information on than Masharawi's earlier films. *Ticket to Jerusalem* was filmed during the second *intifada* and was quite difficult to film because of the restrictions on movement at the time. It was produced by Masharawi's own Cinema Production Center in Ramallah in conjunction with Argus Film Produktie, Arte France Cinema, SBS Independent, and Silkroad Production; the last three companies are French. While filming *Ticket to Jerusalem*, Masharawi also made a short, informal documentary, titled "Keep Shoting [*sic*]," about the process of making the movie which he posted to his YouTube channel. Perhaps the most striking part of the footage that is relevant to the creation of the film, is when Masharawi and his team are in an apartment in the West Bank, the day before they are scheduled to go to Jerusalem for filming, and have just received notice that their request to enter Jerusalem was denied. His assistant producer, Ahmad Habash, explains that they have to go to Jerusalem tomorrow, so they will go illegally. The footage picks up the next day as the film crew are traveling towards the border, and Masharawi explains that they could not wait for Israel to grant them permission because he is on a schedule. Though he does not mention it in the footage, any significant deviation from a film's schedule almost always results in unexpected expenditures and exceeding the film's budget. In this case, Masharawi explains that he already has everything he needs for filming—actors, props, equipment—arranged, and he cannot delay. He also explains

⁶ However, shortly after its creation, Masharawi launched his own production company, the Cinema Production Center, and a mobile cinema that both operated from Ramallah, so it is likely that both *Curfew* and *Haifa* were able to be viewed in the West Bank eventually.

that he submitted a request for entry well in advance because his decision to film in Jerusalem was not last minute. He refuses to let the occupation dictate his film schedule and claims "I believe I manage, and I think I will manage" (Masharawi "Keep Shooting"). Capturing this moment and the crew's subsequent illegal crossing on film provides an unusually stark image of what filmmakers in the West Bank must do to create their films. The illegality of the situation does not seem to bother Masharawi much. As he points out, he has been living in Ramallah illegally for years because, as a Gazan, he is not allowed to live in the West Bank. In the same portion of the video, Masharawi tells the camera that he does not care if the Israelis arrest him for crossing into Jerusalem illegally. "I don't mind" he says and goes on to say he just hopes they do not catch him before he is done filming ("Keep Shooting"). The footage, which only covers a short portion of Masharawi's filming, contains many images of checkpoints and a number of illegal crossings as well as trouble with both Israeli soldiers and Palestinian groups. More than anything else, this candid footage demonstrates the difficulty of physically filming in Israel and the West Bank for a Palestinian. Obtaining funding and the technical equipment and crew for filming is difficult for Palestinian film projects, but it is, at least, relatively safe. The actual filming is not only difficult, but also quite often dangerous.

Ticket to Jerusalem received somewhat better distribution internationally than Masharawi's earlier two films. With the continued escalation of the second *intifada* underway in the West Bank and Gaza, it is unlikely that the film reached a Palestinian audience at home at the time. Though Masharawi, himself, tried to improve Palestinians' access to films, by 2002 (when *Ticket to Jerusalem* was released) the violence of the second *intifada* was at a crescendo and Masharawi was forced to abandon both his film distribution efforts and Ramallah, his home for the better part of a decade, and leave the West Bank.

Layla's Birthday is, arguably, Masharawi's most successful film and is a Palestinian-Dutch coproduction with support from a number of French sources as well. Perhaps the most obvious difference between *Layla's Birthday* and Masharawi's previous films, in terms of funding and technical equipment, is that far more production companies were involved. In other words, he was able to garner much more support for *Layla's Birthday* than for any of his previous films. This could be due to a number of reasons, prime among them that by 2009, Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* and Hany Abu Assad's *Paradise Now* had received international critical acclaim, thus demonstrating that films from Palestine, made by Palestinians, could be financially successful and appeal to a wider audience than previously thought, inspiring more production companies to invest in Palestinian filmmakers. Another factor that likely impacted the increased availability of foreign funds for *Layla's Birthday* is the simple fact that Masharawi was no longer living in the West Bank when the film was made. Though it is filmed in Ramallah, Masharawi had immigrated to Paris in 2002, which may have given him greater access to European sources of funding and perhaps led him to develop more extensive networks among other filmmakers.

Whatever the reasons for the increased financial and technical support for *Layla's Birthday*, the end result was a higher quality film than Masharawi's previous ventures that was distributed further and received a much higher level of acceptance among its audiences. *Layla's Birthday* was widely distributed in the US as well as in Europe and received at least some distribution in the Arab world as well. When discussing *Layla's Birthday* and the different audience responses to it and his other films, Masharawi claims:

Many people outside Palestine like my films because they show another way of life here. They show Palestinians as human beings like everyone else: as people who love, like, and cry, and who are disappointed and so on. In Palestine people react differently to my films. Ordinary Palestinians like my films but they would

like to see more direct messages in them. However, I don't like to show fights, flags, fire, and the Intifada since I am an artist. I like to do it in a more subtle way. (qtd in Roffey, Prillewitz, and Hourani)

Masharawi points out the difficulty of appealing to both an international audience, which does not understand how Palestinians live day-to-day under occupation and therefore, like to see films that show everyday Palestinian lives and culture, and the Palestinian audience, who already know how day-to-day life under occupation looks and wish to see more direct ideological claims in his films. This balance is one with which all Palestinian filmmakers struggle to some degree. Sacrificing art for politics does not go over well in Western countries, many of which sponsor the larger film festivals that offer high-dollar prizes, but the politics is often what is more important to the people, the Palestinians themselves, whose daily lives are impacted by the events depicted in the films.

At first glance, Masharawi's films seem less thematically cohesive as a group than Khleifi's. The film style and quality is quite different between each film as is the subject matter, and specific overt themes are not contiguous from film to film. However, this seeming erraticism is the result of the director's creative process—Khleifi and Masharawi draw on significantly different intellectual and psychological mechanisms to create their films. While Khleifi predominantly draws upon his imagination and theories about cinema of the poor in order to create films, creating a continuity between them, Masharawi draws upon his personal experiences with life in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza for both the inspiration and creation of his films. Each Masharawi film is the expression of an event or time period in Masharawi's life: *Curfew* draws upon his experience as a refugee in the Gaza camp, where military curfews were regularly imposed on its inhabitants; *Haifa* draws upon Masharawi's disillusionment with the peace process and the loss of hope that resulted from the Oslo Accords for himself as well as

other Palestinians; *Ticket to Jerusalem* draws upon his experiences with creating and trying to maintain a mobile cinema; and *Layla's Birthday* draws upon his experiences of everyday life in Ramallah after Oslo. Like Khleifi, or any filmmaker for that matter, Masharawi does have certain objectives that he wishes to accomplish with his films, but, unlike Khleifi, he draws less on theories of cinema and abstract experiences and more on his own concrete experiences and personal desires to demonstrate life under occupation in Palestine. In his interviews, two related concepts come up with regularity and can also be seen in his films: the belief that the world view of the post-67 generation is distinct from the generations of Palestinians who have memories of Palestine from before the occupation and the need to focus on maintaining and continuing to develop a Palestinian cultural heritage despite the impediments of the occupation. The second concept can be said to derive from the first and both develop themes that are specific to Masharawi's work and distinguish his body of films from that of other Palestinian directors.

Masharawi has made his thoughts on the disjuncture between the generation that has memories of Palestine from before the Israeli Occupation and the subsequent generations who have no direct recollection of a Palestine before Israel plain in both interviews and through his films. He offers his most succinct description of his opinion on the gap between generations in his interview with Armaly, claiming:

The difference between my generation and our parents is that they missed Jaffa, real houses, real gardens. Many people from other cities used to come to Jaffa to have holiday, to shop, to go to a café; my father used to go to the cinemas. They came from this childhood, so they missed this. But in my generation, what we miss is not ours. - it can just be what the UN gave us. (Masharawi "An Interview")

For Masharawi, the absence of memory has a devastating effect on Palestinian culture. Not only does the post-'67 generation lack concrete memories of the physical Palestine—land, spaces, places, etc—but, more importantly, they lack memories of the culture that land produced. Gertz

and Khleifi argue that this lack of direct memory is why directors like Masharawi do not make many references to the past and avoid recreating it as a “living memory” (*Palestinian* 111). Instead, Gertz and Khleifi claim that “in Masharawi films, human destiny is intertwined with political destiny and leads to neither freedom nor enlightenment. This fate, described exclusively in the present, evokes the initial crisis, the distant defeat, as an imaginary echo, as the return of the repressed.” (*Palestinian* 102). They go on to argue that the daily crises and minor traumas of the present in Masharawi’s films are essentially allegories of the past traumas of war and occupation (*Palestinian* 103), which create a layering of present difficulties over past traumas. These past traumas then suffuse the present, despite their lack of direct representation or reference (*Palestinian* 111).

Though Gertz and Khleifi raise interesting points that may be relevant to many of Masharawi’s films, their stance is problematic in several ways. Their argument hinges on the claim that the intertwined human and political destiny does not lead to either freedom or enlightenment—which is a reasonable claim to make based on their reading of Masharawi’s films as bleak and hopeless. However, I would argue that Masharawi’s films are not so bleak as Gertz and Khleifi claim. To be sure, the films treat seemingly hopeless topics, and Masharawi offers no grand solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Masharawi himself, when discussing *Layla’s Birthday* claims “throughout the film, I tried to create a sense of hope by shedding a little light on positive and promising elements that hint to a better future” (Kino International). Indeed, I would argue that most of Masharawi’s films *do* end in such a way as to reinforce a rather hopeful idea: the triumph of Palestinian family life and culture over the difficulties and absurdities of occupation. *Curfew* ends with the birth of a child—new, healthy life in spite of miserable living conditions under occupation; *Ticket to Jerusalem* ends with a reconciliation

between Jabir and Sanaa and a successful screening of a Palestinian film in Jerusalem; and *Layla's Birthday* ends with Layla's birthday dinner—happy parents, a happy child and no mention of the day's absurdities. *Haifa* ends more ambivalently than the other three films with the crossing of a funeral and a protest parade. However, even with this uncertain ending, I find the claim that all of Masharawi's films are bleak and hopeless to be a bit of a stretch.

Another problematic aspect of Gertz and Khleifi's argument is the claim that present, seemingly unrelated traumas, are always already allegories of past traumas. While the films can be read this way, it is perhaps not the most productive reading. *Layla's Birthday*, for example, is set in present day Ramallah, with very few references to any past events. The past is present as a foundation for why things are the way they are in modern day Palestine. Any film about modern life of Palestinians in Palestine will evoke past traumas because those traumas are foundational events for modern life in Palestine. In this way, the fact that traumas of the past haunt but are not directly referenced in most of Masharawi's films is neither surprising nor unique. The presence of the past in the present in *Layla's Birthday* is no different than that in other Palestinian films or other films in general—the past always affects and underlies the present in some way. Unlike in *Haifa*, where the past is present in the trauma and character of Haifa, or in *Curfew*, where the past is present through familial traditions, traumas of the past are not visually figured in a central character in *Layla's Birthday*. This is not surprising, given the film's scope and story line, both of which are firmly rooted in the present. Abu Layla's cab is a vehicle by which Masharawi is able to incorporate various vignettes of contemporary Palestinian life under occupation. Abu Layla's patrons represent various plights of contemporary Palestinian life with little reference to the past that created the present circumstances. Gertz and Khleifi would likely argue that these plights, no matter how minor or absurd, are allegorical for Palestinian national traumas. In such a

reading, the past is always already present in contemporary difficulties—essentially tying the whole of Palestinian culture and existence to the national traumas of the past. While the *Nakba* (catastrophe) and *Naksa* (setback), mourned and ritualized in contemporary Palestinian culture, are certainly a highly significant, even central, part of Palestinian history and culture, they do not comprise the entirety of Palestinian cultural traditions. Though it is important to understand how the traumas of the twentieth century influence and shape Palestinian artistic expression, assuming these traumas as an always already, *de facto* presence and insisting on their prominence in films or other works of art that are actively trying to avoid or move beyond them reduces Palestinian artistic expression to a cycle of various expressions or representations of these seemingly inescapable historical events.

Masharawi actively attempts to leave past traumas that his generation did not experience directly out of his films in an effort to further what he sees as a more genuine expression of Palestinian culture. After discussing the differences in memories between his and his parents' generations, Masharawi explains

But in my generation, what we miss is not ours. - it can just be what the UN gave us....We are speaking here about culture - food, school, or architecture of the houses - the camps produce a culture which is not our culture. And it is that which is seen in all the media images, which someone takes to say "they are the Palestinians". But that is not us - what you see is the political situation that put us into that culture. ("An Interview")

His career has been spent working to create spaces for genuine "Palestinian" cultural expressions and producing films that try to rectify this situation. To date, he is the only Palestinian director who has attempted to run a production company, the Cinema Production Center, out of the West Bank, in Ramallah, and has spent significant amounts of time and resources on attempts at creating and supporting mobile cinema units that bring films to small and isolated villages. Though these ventures were ultimately short lived because of the second *intifada* and

Masharawi's subsequent move from Ramallah, they represent significant attempts to return agency to Palestinians who have, according to Masharawi, long been denied such agency in their own cultural production.

It is no surprise, then, that Masharawi's fictional films are more focused on cultural production than historical documentation, and his political stance appears to be more ideologically consistent with *sumud* than *intifada*. In fact, most of his comments about the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, with which he is more familiar than many directors, having spent significant portions of his life in the Occupied Territories, reflect a desire for Palestinians to turn inward, toward cultural production as a form of resistance rather than direct physical resistance. In an interview conducted around the time of *Layla's Birthday*'s release, Masharawi argues

After sixty years of occupation, we have tried every means to regain our freedom, but things are moving to the worst. This has led to frustration and boredom not only from the occupation, but also from ourselves being always alert and having to cope with the occupation, resistance and leading our daily lives. I think the time has come for us to lead a normal life inside our cities and homes, to raise our kids, and to try to realize our simplest dreams. (Kino International)

While this last statement would appear to ignore the reality that living a "normal" life in the West Bank and Gaza is not actually possible, Masharawi's films demonstrate that *attempting* to live a normal life and refusing to let the occupation interfere with life's daily functions as much as possible is also a form of resistance. It is precisely this view that is reflected in his films, primarily through the dogged persistence of Palestinian families in attempting to maintain access to life's necessities and establish order over the chaos that is life under occupation.

Though access is perhaps the most prominent and consistent theme throughout Palestinian fictional film, the bulk of Palestinian films focus on *access to space*, specifically, usually focusing on border crossings and tight, enclosed spaces. Masharawi's films certainly

participate in this motif, but in addition, they explore how Palestinians create access to normalcy under the decidedly abnormal condition of occupation. In each of his four films, the characters struggle to complete actions that, were the characters not living under military occupation, should be simple and quick. In *Curfew*, the family is primarily denied access to the world outside of their home during the curfew; however, they are also denied access to groceries and doctors because of the curfew, and these issues comprise the bulk of the film. In *Haifa*, Abu Sayed is denied access to work as a police officer because of the uncertainties of the occupation; Haifa is denied access to sanity because of the trauma of his expulsion from the city, Haifa; and Um Sayed is denied the cultural tradition of planning a marriage for her son, who refuses to get married because of his participation in the resistance. In *Ticket to Jerusalem*, Jabir is denied access to an audience for his films and is routinely and sometimes harshly criticized for continuing his mobile cinema in the face of such difficulties. In *Layla's Birthday*, Abu Layla is denied access to a job commensurate with his education and experience and denied the ability to do something as simple as buy a suitable birthday present for his daughter. The access these characters seek and often refuse to be denied is not for extraordinary things: food, health care, work, mental stability, cultural events and celebrations. In fact, access to these things is the very bedrock of most modern, industrialized societies—in other words, access to these things is the norm in many countries—and the characters often succeed in achieving access to these goals, though doing so is harder and takes longer than it would were they not under occupation. The family in *Curfew* is able to secure enough food for the duration of the curfew, a midwife is secretly fetched, and the baby is born safe and healthy; Jabir, in *Ticket to Jerusalem*, has a successful screening in Jerusalem and reconciles with his wife; and Abu Layla does, miraculously, find that he made it home with a cake, a birthday gift, and even some flowers for

his wife. In each of these films, direct access to necessities is denied, but the persistence and courage of the characters prevails over the strictures of the occupation, and the necessities are obtained.

Overcoming the strictures of occupation in these films also results in reaffirming family units and social ties. Though this reaffirmation happens in all three films, it is perhaps best exemplified by *Ticket to Jerusalem*. Throughout the film, Jabir and Sanaa have had marital trouble because of Jabir's insistence on continuing his mobile cinema. The checkpoints and travel delays that he encounters on his trips leave Sanaa at home alone most evenings, and she begins to fear Jabir is having an affair with Um Ibrahim—she has never met Um Ibrahim and does not realize that Um Ibrahim is an old, frail woman. Sanaa, eventually over powered by her curiosity about Jabir's Jerusalem goings-on, travels to Jerusalem and to Um Ibrahim's home herself, where any concerns she had are remedied immediately upon meeting Um Ibrahim. At the end of the film, during the Jerusalem screening, Sanaa joins Jabir, and all is well. Their marriage is reaffirmed, and Sanaa seems to develop a new appreciation of the importance of Jabir's work. This reconciliation also takes place in the midst of a social event in which Palestinians in Jerusalem have gathered to enjoy a Palestinian cultural product, the film. This gathering takes place, quite literally, under the noses of several Israeli citizens who stand on the balcony and stairs. This final scene, then, reaffirms both the Palestinian family unit, through Jabir and Sanaa's marriage, as well as Palestinian cultural expression in the face of Israeli opposition, through the location of the screening.

Through his characters' insistence on accessing items and services that should be part of a normal existence, Masharawi also demonstrates the efforts of the Palestinian people to establish some type of order over the chaotic conditions of occupation. Though this theme is

easily demonstrated through the ordering of families and social relationships in *Curfew* and the ordering of the screening space in *Ticket to Jerusalem*, Abu Layla's attempt to impose order on his taxi's occupants is perhaps the most overt example of this theme. In fact, the attempt to impose order on the chaotic world of Ramallah under occupation is a primary theme of *Layla's Birthday*. Abu Layla is, himself, the very symbol of law and order—a former judge. As such, he



Figure 6: Sanaa and Jabir at the Jerusalem screening.

insists on certain rules in his cab—no smoking, no checkpoints—and tries to behave in a traditionally moral way—he wears and insists that passengers wear a seat belt for safety, he tries to return the phone that was left in his back seat, he refuses to drive around teenage couples who want privacy. For all his efforts, however, the city continues to disintegrate into chaos around him. The climax of the film occurs when Abu Layla has reached his breaking point, grabs a nearby PA system and begins berating the city for its unruly ways. Abu Layla is unable to enforce his sense of law and order on the city, and his attempts to do so drive him to the brink of

sanity. He is calmed and returned to his car by the gas station attendant and the owner of the PA system who know him—demonstrating the importance of social relationships. When he arrives home, defeated and dejected, he is entering the one sphere where order reigns and things go smoothly: his home. He, his wife, and Layla have a birthday party for Layla, complete with cake,



Figure 7: Abu Layla yells at the Israeli helicopter during his tirade.

gifts, and no discussion of the day's dismal events. The family unit is order amidst chaos for Abu Layla, and Abu Layla's social ties and family keep him grounded and give him hope.

Haifa, however, is a bit of an exception to the general success and hopefulness of Masharawi's other characters, and the themes of the film deviate from those in Masharawi's other films. *Haifa* is Masharawi's most symbolic and allegorical film, which produces a somewhat different effect than his others. The ambiguity of *Haifa*'s ending creates little resolution to the issues presented in the film. Haifa's fantasies have been shattered by the reality that his former betrothed is married, but the viewer is left wondering to what degree this reality will be accepted by Haifa and whether this reality check, so to speak, will allow Haifa to develop

a more realistic view of the world. Given that the character of Haifa is meant to symbolically convey the disillusionment of the Palestinian people after the Oslo accords (Masharawi “Rashid Masharawi”), it is no surprise that Haifa’s fate, like that of the Palestinians after Oslo, was left undetermined.

One last element that marks Masharawi’s films as distinct from other Palestinian films is that he does not give much time or space to Israelis within his films. Gertz and Khleifi argue that, in *Curfew*

Resistance to the hegemonic might of the rulers is expressed in the films in one other way: by driving them out of the cinematic frame. [...] Although the Israelis dictate the cinematic narrative--the Palestinians life story--they themselves lack a narrative, when no reasons are suggested for their existence, both in the specific place where the film unrolls, Gaza, and in the wider space, Israel/Palestine. (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 116-7)

This technique is carried through his other films as well. The Israeli military presence is most visible in *Ticket to Jerusalem*, but even in this film, there is no explanation as to why the road blocks exist. Only one soldier has a brief speaking role, which is simply to tell Jabir that he cannot go through. The Israelis at Um Ibrahim’s likewise do not have a role beyond being another obstacle that Jabir must navigate. Though they speak and shout insults to the Palestinians, they are nameless and story-less. Israelis are not pictured at all in *Layla’s Birthday* or *Haifa*. This denial of visibility and narrative is a sharp and poignant reversal of the lack of visibility that Palestinians suffer daily.

Ali Nassar: Melodrama and Israeli Money

Like those of Rashid Masharawi, Ali Nassar’s films are not as well known in international film circles, though his first feature film, *The Milky Way* (1997) was more widely distributed than many Palestinian films. Nassar is somewhat unusual among Palestinian directors

in that he has accepted Israeli funds for all of his feature film projects and does not seem to have suffered many consequences for that choice, unlike director Elia Suleiman who accepted Israeli money for *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, but regretted it later when the Israeli Fund for Quality Film tried to censor his work. Nassar was born in Arraba less than a decade after it was seized by Israel, so, like Khleifi, he grew up in a largely Arab city in Israel proper. Also like Khleifi, he left Israel for his education, but, unlike the other Palestinian directors in this dissertation who received the bulk of their film education and training in Western Europe or the United States, Nassar was trained and educated in the Soviet Union in the mid to late 1970s. He accepted a scholarship from the Communist Party and studied film in Moscow from 1975 to 1981, at which time he returned to Israel. Interestingly, his education in the USSR and his ties to the former Soviet Bloc and Communist Party create a distinct ideological alignment in his films that differs from many other Palestinian directors. His global-local-national nexus has a distinctly Eastern slant, which tends towards an emphasis on the importance of the community. However, unlike Khleifi and Masharawi who continue to draw upon their European connections and both of whom eventually settled in Europe, Nassar has remained in Israel and draws largely on Israeli film connections and funding. His reliance on Israeli funding, personnel, and equipment make him the least transnational director in this project, and his nexus is heavily slanted toward the national and local, though his films do circulate globally as well. Despite this local emphasis, his contribution to Palestinian film is nonetheless notable, and his willingness to use the mechanisms of Palestinian oppression to draw attention to that oppression is both a bold and unusual move as well as a potentially problematic one.

The Milky Way (1997) was Nassar's first somewhat successful feature film, though it was preceded by a largely unsuccessful first film. According to Gertz and Khleifi, Nassar's first

attempt at a feature film, *The Wet Nurse* (1994), was a costly venture that never received distribution and was only screened once, in Nassar's home village (*Palestinian* 46). Though *The Wet Nurse* was filmed in Romania and indicates that Nassar maintained and used some of his Soviet connections for this first film, its ultimate failure to achieve viewership beyond a single audience renders it not particularly useful for this project. His second feature film, *The Milky Way*, drew heavily on Israeli funding and was produced through a company called Sanabil Productions, Ltd. Nasser was the first Palestinian recipient of a grant from the Fund for the Promotion of Israeli Quality Films (Twair). *The Milky Way* was filmed in the West Bank town of Mughayyir, and its scenery takes in the eastern slopes of the Samarian Hills. In terms of distribution, *The Milky Way* received a rather wide distribution by Palestinian film standards. It did well on the international film circuit and was distributed in France by Beamlight and in the US by Kino International and Facets Multimedia. *The Milky Way* was received with mixed reviews by Israeli and Palestinian audience, as many Palestinian films are. Israeli audiences, as a whole, praised the film, though some criticized its depiction of the Israeli military occupation (Twair). Nasser was criticized on the Palestinian side for not treating the military occupation harshly enough and for taking Israeli money to fund the project (Gertz and Khliefi *Palestinian* 46).

In the Ninth Month also received money from the Israel Film Fund and was also produced by Sanabil Productions. It traveled to a few international film festivals, but its primary audience was in Israel proper. It was nominated for seven Israeli Oscars, but won none (Gertz and Khliefi *Palestinian* 46). *Whispering Embers* similarly received its funding from the Israel Film Fund but was produced by Praxis Films. Both films enjoyed rather brief stints at

international film festivals and did not receive wide distribution. They also warranted mixed reviews in terms of content, style, and political message.

In terms of a particular accent, Nassar has a distinct filmic style, though perhaps somewhat less pronounced than Khleifi's, and a flair for the melodramatic, plot-driven film. That being said, his plots are often fairly complex and develop several themes that are unique to his work while also participating in themes that are prominent throughout Palestinian film. Nassar's film style could perhaps be best described as a combination between Khleifi's and Masharawi's. It possesses some of the lyricism of Khleifi's films, though these lyrical methods are not applied as consistently as in Khleifi's films, but also incorporates the kind of stylistic variations based on content that are more characteristic of Masharawi's films. Like Khleifi, Nassar uses meticulous



Figure 8: High contrast lighting of Jamilia in *The Milky Way*

scene compositions and lighting to create soft, often pastoral, scenes of village life or the natural surroundings in his films. Though also used in *In the Ninth Month* and *Whispering Embers*, this technique is most thoroughly applied in *The Milky Way* with the result that the 1964 village has a dream-like quality. In *In the Ninth Month* and *Whispering Embers*, both of which are set closer to the present time and lack the same kind of ethereal quality of *The Milky Way*, these lyrical techniques are typically applied to nature scenes, love scenes and dream sequences, while many other scenes lack the same meticulous attention to composition and lighting.

On a structural level, Nassar's films offer relatively complex plots that sometimes take the place of in-depth characterization. While Khleifi's and Masharawi's films tend to move more or less linearly with subplots building from the primary plotline, which is usually focused on a



Figure 9: *In the Ninth Month*: a love scene in nature that demonstrates Nassar's attention to scene composition.

single protagonist, Nassar's films employ a few structural approaches that differentiate his film style from other Palestinian directors. *The Milky Way* is his most structurally simplistic film and consists of Mahmoud's primary plot line which then becomes the point of convergence for the other subplots. However, rather than Mahmoud being the center point from which all subplots

derive, the *mukhtar*, though at first a seemingly peripheral character, provides a secondary epicenter for the various subplots, most of which concern his family members or duty as the head of the village. Mahmoud's subplots—his relationship with Suad and competition with Muhammad for her hand in marriage as well as his friendships with Mabrouk, the village “fool,” and Ahmad, the school teacher—eventually converge with those of the *mukhtar*—his struggles with the Israeli government, his inability to control his son, and his search for the forger. By choosing such a structure for his film, Nassar creates a film that is not purely a story about a village blacksmith, Mahmoud, in a 1964 village under military governance, but one that is about the village as a whole and how the right or wrongdoing of individuals affects that village ecosystem.

Nassar employs the use of flashbacks in *In the Ninth Month* to create layered plots. The plot line is non-linear and disjointed by a series of flashbacks, with each time period developing distinct subplots. The plot line of the past details Ahmad's experience with trying to reconnect his brother, Khalil, to Samira, Khalil's wife who was left behind when Khalil fled the city to become a resistance fighter. In the process of covertly trying to reunite the lovers, a boy goes missing and Ahmad, who cannot explain his goings on without betraying Khalil and Samira, is accused of kidnapping the child and selling him to Israel. This past plotline dominates the majority of the film, but the present timeline, Ahmad's current situation of exile from the village with his nephew, Amal, begins to take precedence towards the end of the film, as the two plot lines converge. The plot line of the present draws on the subplots of the past as back ground but then moves forward into its own lines of plot development with Ahmad explaining his exile and his actual relation to Amal. This plot arrangement, though not novel, creates mystery and

suspense in the film as the viewer, like Amal, does not understand how the past and present fit together until the end of the film.

Nassar employs a similar layering and then converging of plot lines in *Whispering Embers*, but uses Jamal's novel to differentiate the plots rather than temporal flashbacks. The primary timeline follows Abir, Jamal's abandoned wife, as she copes with his absence, hopes for his return, discovers and reads his novel then uses it as a means to convince him to return. As she reads the novel, however, Jamal's plot line of ideological development is revealed. Through Abir's reading of the novel, the viewer follows Jamal's ideological development from avid Communist Party member, to obsessive lover, to religious fanatic before the plot lines converge as Jamal reads portions of his novel that Abir and Gazi have published in the newspaper, finds himself, and returns home to Abir and their son. This is the most complicated plot line of all of Nassar's films and is only partially successful because transitions between the two plot lines are not always clear. Early in the film, Nassar uses shots of Abir reading at the computer screen to indicate a transition to the plot of Jamal's novel. As the film continues, however, these shots become fewer and the transitions become less clear. This was likely intentional as Jamal's novel is presumably based on his life story, and Nassar is attempting to bring the two plot lines together. However, the lack of clear demarcation between the two plot lines towards the end of the novel becomes a potential source of confusion for the viewer.

These plots highlight several themes that are particular to Nassar's work, the most prominent of which are the centrality of the family and, by extension the community, and his emphasis on internal critiques of Palestinian society rather than external critiques of the Israeli Occupation. In their book, Gertz and Khleifi offer a somewhat harsh evaluation of Nassar's two earlier films, *The Milky Way* and *In the Ninth Month*. Their overarching argument is that

Nassar's films occupy an in-between space in Gertz and Khleifi's categories and function to encapsulate prominent trends in Khleifi's and Masharawi's works while also foreshadowing future trends in Palestinian filmmaking, namely what they call "roadblock" and "*intifada*" films (*Palestinian* 132). Gertz and Khleifi proceed to analyze *The Milky Way* and *In the Ninth Month* and, in so doing, make sweeping generalization about Nassar's films and his reliance upon traditional literary themes of "the harmony of land, man, and the nation" (*Palestinian* 122). While I would not go so far as to say their reading of Nassar's films is entirely incorrect, especially given that *Whispering Embers* was not treated in the book, *Whispering Embers* alters several and dismantles other trends that Gertz and Khleifi identify in Nassar's films.

Gertz and Khleifi lay particular emphasis on the fairly common theme in Palestinian literature that there is or should be a harmony between land, man, and the nation. They go on to argue that the themes of unity between land, man, and nation usually draw on references to an ideal past, are frequently reflected in the harmony, or lack thereof, in the family unit, and emphasize the centrality and importance of the male characters to achieving this balance (*Palestinian* 122). They go on to make a convincing argument regarding how *The Milky Way* fits into this schema in ways that are similar to narratives in Palestinian literature, essentially, though not explicitly, making the argument that *The Milky Way* is derivative in unoriginal ways. In Nassar's films, the harmony between land, man, and nation is primarily represented through his emphasis on the family unit and, according to Gertz and Khleifi, relies on the male characters' abilities to maintain harmony within the family unit (*Palestinian* 122).

Whispering Embers, however, problematizes this reading. Though the film revolves around Jamal's abandonment of his wife and child in search of more reliable spiritual symbols, his return and the restoration of harmony to his family is the result of Abir's efforts, not Jamal's.

In many ways, Abir is the hero of the story that Jamal cannot be. Jamal's departure and subsequent ventures are entirely self-serving. He abandons his responsibilities to his family and his community after he loses faith in his political ideology, Communism. He thus, goes in search of something else to believe in. His absence causes trouble for his immediate and extended family, but, unlike in *The Milky Way*, the entire village is not put in jeopardy because of Jamal's selfish personal quest. In this case, Abir, a woman, is the entity that attempts to restore harmony to her family and eventually succeeds. After growing tired of waiting for Jamal's return, she seeks the help of a diviner, and publishing Jamal's novel in the hopes of flushing him out of hiding is her idea. Though the male presence continues to be a central component of the harmony of the family, the actions of the female character, not those of the male character, in this film result in the restoration of family and community harmony. Jamal spends the entire film trying to discover what Abir knew all along: family and community are more important than political movements and ideology.

The connection to the physical land is also diminished in *Whispering Embers*, unlike in *The Milky Way* and *In the Ninth Month*. *Whispering Embers* largely occupies an urban setting in which neither of the characters are farmers nor have a direct connection to fertile land. The only connection to the "land" that can be argued is Jamal's revelations, which often take place on the sea shore. The sea shore, however, is not in and of itself a benevolent or saving entity. It only offers Jamal space for his own thoughts, and does not bring enlightenment or peace of its own accord. During his discussion with Lelia by the seashore, when she tells him she has come to the sea to purify her soul, Jamal begins to see her as his new spiritual symbol, and their relationship turns sexual after this encounter. After he learns of the fall of the USSR, he stops the car and runs to the sea, claiming the same thing Leila had claimed in their previous discussion: that he

wants to purify his soul. The beach becomes a place where Jamal seeks purification and renewal, but in reality, it becomes a dangerous liminal space in which he grasps desperately at new spiritual symbols when the old ones fail. When Jamal wakes with the extremists, he learns that he was found wounded and wandering on the beach. They offer him a new ideology, one that runs counter to both Communism and Leila's sexuality. The beach and the ocean do eventually offer him a chance at salvation, but only through the image of his wife and child. This image further establishes Abir's connection to the natural world and offers Jamal the final proof he needs to accept that his family should have been his priority all along. Jamal's preoccupation with the edges of the land, that liminal space between land and sea, proves dangerous, though it is also through this space that he is able to realize the errors of his ways and return to his family and village. The sea shore becomes a space of transition and revelation for Jamal, but it is not, in and of itself, a symbol of wholeness, salvation, or harmony as land often is in Palestinian literature.

Gertz and Khleifi do give Nassar some credit for his handling of female characters, but they argue that he stops short of making the kinds of feminist statements that Khleifi's films make. They claim that Nassar's female characters display some of the rebellion of Khleifi's female characters but that female liberation is not realized in his films (*Palestinian* 123). This analysis, however, relies too heavily on *The Milky Way*, whose female characters are not particularly prominent and, because Gertz and Khleifi's analysis was published before the film was created, does not consider *Whispering Embers* at all. Abir, in *Whispering Embers*, however, represents the end of the development of Nassar's female characters who progress in agency and rebelliousness with each film. Though the *mukhtar*'s daughter and Suad in *The Milky Way* are not entirely passive characters, they are relatively small characters, and their rebellions are

relatively minor. In *In the Ninth Month*, however, both Sanaa and Samira are bolder, Sanaa leading protests in town and sneaking away for romantic interludes with Ahmad and Samira defying her father's wishes for her to remarry and attempting to run away with her husband. Though Sanaa and Samira are strong willed and attempt to act of their own accord, things do not work out well for the two female character of *In the Ninth Month*. Sanaa is forced to believe that Ahmad has betrayed her for Samira because Ahmad cannot tell her the real reason he has been sneaking around with Samira—he has been helping Samira connect with her husband, Khalil, Ahmad's brother. Samira, unable to escape with Khalil and pregnant with his child, is forced to marry Ahmad, who is accused of being the father of the child, and she later dies in child birth. Despite their best efforts at shaking off patriarchal strictures, Sanaa and Samira, as well as Ahmad to some degree, fall victim to patriarchal traditions. However, Abir is her own person, from the beginning of the film to its end, refusing to be swayed by her husband's political obsessions and remaining steadfast in her own beliefs. Though she worries that she does not understand Jamal and his political beliefs, she does not suffer his abuses idly, defending herself when he angrily attacks her for being overly concerned with what he deems inconsequential home details. Though she seeks to bring her husband home, even after she discovers his affair, she does not welcome him with open arms, instead slamming the door in his face and turning her back to him when he enters the home. She does, eventually, accept his return and their family is made whole again, reinforcing the importance of the family unit, but Abir has taken an active role in reuniting her family and has not sacrificed her personal beliefs in the process.

Perhaps the most singular thematic quality of Nassar's films is the emphasis on critiquing Palestinian society rather than the Israeli occupation. To be sure, other Palestinian films offer internal critique as well, and Nassar's films demonstrate no love of Israeli military occupation

and include some references to Israel's oppression of Palestinians, but the emphasis is on Palestinian society, not Israeli military occupation, to a much greater degree than other Palestinian filmmakers. *The Milky Way* predominantly treats the problems of corruption in Palestinian villages and government through the corrupt *mukhtar* and his problematic family—a spoiled, philandering son and a quietly revolutionary daughter, though many other issues are touched upon as well: the problem of young Palestinian men needing to find work to support their families instead of further their education, the trouble of hearsay allegations and rumors, and the problems of intra-Palestinian violence. While the military government plays a role in the film and is a primary cause of many unpleasant realities in the lives of the characters, including the unwarranted arrest of Mabrouk and the beating of Ahmad, the primary drama is focused around the corruptions of the Palestinian village itself, particularly the *mukhtar* and his son. Muhamad, the *mukhtar*'s son, is, in many ways, depicted as almost as problematic as the IDF soldiers. There are certainly many parallels between the two throughout the film. Muhamad takes what he wants, when he wants it, and when Mahmoud gets in his way, Muhamad raids and tries to burn down Mahmoud's house (much like the IDF who demolish houses for little or no reason) and resorts to physical violence, which ultimately results in his own death. To solidify the comparison and further emphasize the intra-Palestinian critique, an IDF soldier asks his commanding officer about the fight between Mahmoud and Muhamad and the officer tells him that the fight and the death of the *mukhtar*'s son is not a matter of national security. He tells the younger soldier, "let them kill themselves" (*Milky Way*). In this pivotal scene at the climax of the film, the Israeli characters remove themselves from the drama and deliver a line that starkly illuminates the possible consequences of intra-Palestinian problems. The Israelis are not the villain of the film—or, at least, not the primary villain—and this shift further emphasizes that the

central critique this film offers is not of Israeli military control or occupation, but of Palestinian village politics and the corruption therein.

The Israeli presence is further marginalized in *In the Ninth Month* and *Whispering Embers*, which is curious given the setting of both films. The films are set during the end of the first *intifada* and, yet, neither film mentions the uprisings. There are clear elements of resistance within each film, but neither film elaborates on resistance beyond vague references. Khalil has fled to Lebanon for his role in resisting the Israelis in *In the Ninth Month*. In *Whispering Embers*, there is much discussion of regime change, and Jamal does find himself a member of an extremist group by the end of the film; however, neither of these political activities are explicitly directed at the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Jamal's Communist phase is just as much about what is going on in the Soviet Union as it is about any type of resistance to Israel, and Jamal's suicide video for the extremists emphasizes his action as a personal vendetta against Leila and Richard and retribution for their behavior, not as resistance to Israeli Occupation. In *In the Ninth Month*, Ahmad's problems only indirectly stem from the occupation—his brother is a wanted man and must therefore hide from Israeli police and IDF, and keeping Khalil's secret leads to Ahmad being accused of being a kidnapper and an Israeli collaborator. Ahmad's primary troubles stem from problems in Palestinian society—he is accused of kidnapping and collaboration and becomes a victim of rumors and mob-mentality despite a lack of evidence, which is a theme that appears in all of Nassar's films to varying degrees, and his relationship with Sanaa is ruined because he must marry his brother's pregnant wife for her own safety from archaic traditions. Similarly, Jamal's problems do not stem directly from the presence of Israel or the occupation. Jamal's problems are all self-inflicted and virtually unrelated to Israel's occupation of Palestine. Jamal's struggles are internal, ideological struggles that concern

personal belief systems more so than political ones, though there is overlap between the two.

Whispering Embers is a story about Jamal's struggle to find an appropriate person, object, or idea in which to put his faith, not about specific resistance to occupation or injustice.

Conclusions

Though Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, and Ali Nassar continue to make films to this day, their early contributions to Palestinian cinema continue to be important in understanding how Palestinian fictional film has developed and progressed over the years. With his pioneering efforts, Michel Khleifi set the standard for employing European funds to create high quality Palestinian films. His films draw heavily on abstract film theories and demonstrate the ability of Palestinians to create rich films set and filmed in their homelands, despite the many obstacles therein. Rashid Masharawi also uses European connections to make and distribute his films, but because of his location in the West Bank, he also sought to develop talent within the West Bank through his production company and mobile film unit. His willingness to transgress the rules of occupation in order to make his films and his drawing predominantly on concrete personal experiences for their subject matter also demonstrates an important side to Palestinian filmmaking that Khleifi's films miss. Though Khleifi's films are beautiful and complex, the situation on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza is often gritty, hard and dangerous as are Masharawi's films and his process of making them. Nassar offers yet another approach to Palestinian film that distinguishes him from Khleifi and Masharawi. His methods are less international and less confrontational than Khleifi's and Masharawi's. Nassar prefers instead to use the resources that are available to him in Israel to create poignant films that employ popular plot devices. These three directors offer different methods of acquiring funding, employ different

ways of accessing multiple audiences, and demonstrate varied style in their efforts to create quality Palestinian films. However, their early efforts serve as a foundation for later filmmakers to build upon as Palestinian filmmakers continue to use these methods while developing new ones as the need arises.

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Chapter Three: More Recent Cinema: Suleiman, Abu Assad, and Jacir

While Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, and Ali Nassar set precedents for the employment of European funds, equipment and personnel in the creation of high quality, Palestinian films, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad, and Annemarie Jacir built upon these precedents to acquire larger budgets and reach broader audiences with higher technical quality films. Though Suleiman, Abu Assad, and Jacir struggled with many of the same financial and technical issues with which the earlier directors also struggled, they represent a significant move towards more Arab and specifically Palestinian funding in their projects. Abu Assad and Jacir both completed films, *Omar* and *When I Saw You* respectively, with almost entirely Palestinian funding. The increased use of Palestinian funding has been accompanied by an increase in using local talent and production crews in these films as well, a factor that created some of its own obstacles while filming. Suleiman, Abu Assad and Jacir also represent a change in the ethno- and mediascapes of Palestinian films. Many of their films, particularly the later ones, were picked up by large, international distributors. Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* and Abu Assad's *Paradise Now*, in particular, were wildly successful by Palestinian film standards, and their recognition helped galvanize investment and distribution of their later films.

Whereas the prominent films of the earlier directors focus on the village and community, the more recent generation narrows the foci of their films. This generation represents a shift from the collective to the individual, from sweeping heroism to the individual's gritty means of survival under occupation—trends in which some of Khleifi and Masharawi's later works also participate. Gertz and Khleifi maintain that this narrowing focus, also seen in the physical narrowing of the frame of the camera and the blocking off of physical space within the films, is the result of the political, economic, social, and physical changes that took place in the West

Bank and Gaza after the implementation of the enclosure system following the 1992 Oslo Accords (135-6).

During the early 1990s, there were also significant shifts in nationalist discourse in the West Bank and Gaza that shaped these directors' approaches to collectivism and Palestinian nationalism. Though Palestinian nationalism has early roots in Arab nationalism (Baumgarten; Khalidi), the ascension of Fatah to power in the late 1960s marked the development of a genuinely Palestinian nationalist movement that continues to maintain much of its political status to this day. Because all three of these directors were born in or after 1960, Fatah's brand of Palestinian nationalism is the primary nationalist ideology against which their films react. In its nearly fifty years in power in Palestine, Fatah and its nationalist message has changed dramatically. Though it began by emphasizing armed struggle as the sole means of liberating the whole of Palestine from Israeli domination, by the late 1980s, Fatah had conceded that politics and diplomacy was the most likely path to liberate the West Bank and Gaza (Baumgarten 36). However, Fatah's failure through the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and, later, through the Palestinian Authority (PA) to make meaningful progress towards eliminating or even alleviating the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza began to erode its popular support (Khalidi 152). Its inability to temper Hamas after the first *intifada* further eroded its legitimacy (Khalidi 152). Having grown up as witnesses to Fatah's brand of nationalism, Suleiman, Abu-Assad and Jacir all came of age or began their film careers at time when Fatah's Palestinian nationalism was failing. As a result, though they and their films affirm the Palestinians' right of sovereignty and self-determination and remain critical of Israeli policies in both Israel and the Occupied Territories, they are also highly skeptical of totalizing nationalist movements that, in

seeking to unify the Palestinian population, also gloss over important nuances and distinctions within that population.

Junka-Aikio argues that the shift away from communal and nationalist approaches in Palestinian film in the 1990s was the result of the failure of nationalistic and, later, humanistic discourses and their respective heroic and tragic narrative modes to offer viable solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli situation (400). Junka-Aikio argues that the heroic narrative mode of nationalism, which offered a clear discourse for national unity, gave way to the tragic narrative modes of humanist discourses, which emphasize “passivity, individualism, victimization, and depoliticisation,” in Palestine in the early 1990s (402-3). Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad, and Annemarie Jacir reject both the heroic nationalist mode as well as the tragic humanist mode in favor of more ambiguous and open-ended modes of narration.

While the three directors I treat in this section all reject traditional concepts of both Fatah’s and Hama’s nationalism as well as ideas of concrete borders, leading to a focus on individual experience of occupation, they also reject much of the humanist discourse that Junka-Aikio describes. While they tend to focus on individual experiences and often highlight the ways in which Palestinians have been victimized by the occupation, the protagonists rarely, if ever adopt the position of pure victimhood and passivity. Rather, these three directors tend to paint their characters with agency and the will to defy the occupation rather than passively succumb to it. Though they reject traditional calls for national unity and often fragment, distort, or otherwise play with the symbols of Palestinian nationalism, they do not reject politicization in general and they certainly favor the formation of an independent Palestinian state. The result of this somewhat ambiguous adoption of elements of humanism and Palestinian identity without Fatah’s brand of nationalism is the somewhat ambiguous film endings. Almost all of the films in this

chapter either end openly without a definitive solution, as with Elia Suleiman's films and *Salt of This Sea*, or deny the viewer the closure of seeing the end result, as with *Paradise Now* and *When I Saw You*. Because of these ambiguous endings, these films often ask more questions than they answer. As a result, these films are more complex, nuanced, and less didactic, generally speaking, than previous Palestinian films.

Elia Suleiman: The Absurdity of Nationalism

Though the beginning of Elia Suleiman's film career overlaps with the three directors discussed in the previous chapter, Suleiman's work demarcates a significant shift, both thematically and artistically, in Palestinian filmmaking that is more characteristic of recent filmmakers. Suleiman was born in Nazareth in 1960 and, like Khleifi, spent his childhood there. He claims that he experienced a pervasive sense of segregation and "otherness" while growing up in Nazareth. According to Suleiman, everyone he encountered was afraid of being harassed or losing their jobs, so no one talked about Palestine or Arab Nationalism, and there were virtually no interactions in his childhood with Jewish people in Nazareth. He recounts that any time he and his family left Nazareth, they felt out of place and inferior ("Interview: The Occupation" 67-8). In 1974, Suleiman's father was arrested on false charges of attempting to smuggle weapons from Lebanon and Suleiman himself was arrested three years later, at the age of 17, also on false charges. Shortly thereafter, Suleiman left for Europe but returned to Nazareth a year later (Gertz and Khleifi 40). Upon his return to Nazareth, Suleiman began to study film independently by acquiring books from his brother who was working at Haifa University at the time. It was through this self-education that he began to find his own voice in film. He recounts to Hamid Dabashi: "I started to read Godard for example and suddenly I felt that I was not a lonely voice,

that I belonged to a sect of people who were rebellious against narrative structure as such, and that they were there in force and that I could belong, and I could nourish myself [*sic*]" (Suleiman in Dabashi 149). However, he actually had to leave the country again in order to watch many of the films he had discovered during his studies. In 1981, Suleiman immigrated illegally to New York City, where he remained for twelve years (Gertz and Khleifi 41; Dabashi 148). He took a list with him that he had compiled while reading in Nazareth. While in New York, Suleiman sought what film education and training he could, often by sneaking in to university lectures at New York University or taking continuing education classes when he could afford them (Quilty). Because his discovery of film was primarily through self-education and personal reflection, his film style and its development was deeply personal rather than aesthetically or intellectually distant (66).

While in New York, Suleiman became particularly critical of the depictions of Palestine and the larger Arab world in the US media (Gertz and Khleifi 41). Dabashi claims that, by the end of the 80s, Suleiman's views on Palestine shared two defining characteristics: (1) "pain and suffering was inexplicable" and (2) the inexplicability of pain and suffering was "mediated by and integral to the layers of collective amnesia generated and sustained by the localized obscenity of the US media" (Dabashi 148). This experience, coupled with his independent film studies and experiences of life in Nazareth led Suleiman to reject approaches to film that involve coherent, linear narratives. Suleiman tells Butler:

Reading was when I began to realize [...] that there are people out there who have similar feelings and resentments concerning the usual mode of expression, and that there *is* an alternative. I discovered that non linearity was another way, and trying to question the image rather than preach it--that's when I began to discover, really, cinema and its potentiality. ("Interview: The Occupation" 66)

His rejection of linearity is perhaps one of the most recognizable characteristics of his films, and all three of his feature film projects present a series of, at first, seemingly disjointed vignettes that are arranged into a tableaux. These tableaux are then arranged in such a way that presents a loose narrative which usually raises more questions than it answers. In 1993, Suleiman accepted a position with Birzeit University in order to help establish their new audiovisual department ("Biography," Quilty). He has since held academic or advisory positions with a number of institutions including the European Graduate School and the Qatar Foundation (Quilty). He even found himself giving a master course in the very film studies classroom he used to sneak into with the help of a friend during his time in New York (Quilty). Throughout his film career, Suleiman gradually developed an approach to film that represents his own beliefs in the effusive goodness and universality of good films, and the need for the spectator to develop a multiplicity of meanings.

His belief in the effusive goodness and universality of film permeates the content of his feature films. In his interview with Wood, Suleiman explains that the spectator can watch and experience moments of happiness and love through a film. Moments which the spectators then carry with them upon leaving the theater and latter apply throughout their lives ("Elia" 219). With such a belief as a motivating force, it is no surprise that Suleiman's films, though treating dark and serious subject matters, include touching moments of love, beauty, and happiness as well as triumphant images of survival under occupation or Israeli rule with which his spectators can abscond long after the film ends. In *Divine Intervention*, for example. ES's relationship with his girlfriend demonstrates several of these characteristics. Their stolen meetings at the A-Ram checkpoint are both darkly comedic and touchingly sincere. These romantic interludes then evolve into a triumphant defeat of the check point as ES and his girlfriend, aided by a red balloon

sporting Yasser Arafat's face, are able to drive past the guards who are distracted by the red balloon. This moment is an emotional high-point of the film in which ES and his girlfriend experience a victory, however small, over the Israeli occupation. This scene represents one of the triumphs that spectators, both Palestinian and non-Palestinian, can take with them as they leave the theater. For Palestinians, ES and his girlfriend triumph over the borders that surround, complicate, and often threaten their lives in very real ways. However, even non-Palestinians and spectators who perhaps have never experienced occupation can relate to and delight in the triumph of ES and his girlfriend overcoming an obstacle in order to be together. For both audiences, the scene can be boiled down into universal platitudes: good triumphs evil; love conquers all.

This checkpoint scene in *Divine Intervention* also demonstrates Suleiman's belief in the universality of good film. Suleiman does not seek to represent only the Palestinian struggle, but instead, sees the occupation of Palestine as a microcosm for other types of oppression and roadblocks to various freedoms throughout the world. He tells Samare

I'm not in the business of saying just one thing about just one place. If you only see Palestine in my films, then I've failed because then I'm just a provincial filmmaker. I think that whatever we express in terms of the potential truth is above all else about mobilizing ourselves for ourselves. We learn about ourselves as individuals. Identification with Palestine is universal and not restricted to geographic boundaries. It's a question of moral and ethical positions vis-à-vis all the injustices that surround us. ("Interview with")

His success in crossing these geographic boundaries and influencing people from varied backgrounds and cultures is borne out by an anecdote he recounts to Wood. He tells Wood "A member of the audience in a screening in New York told me that she felt that my Nazareth was very much like her Los Angeles" ("Elia" 219). It is these types of connections that Suleiman seeks to create with scenes like the one in which ES's girlfriend crosses the checkpoint. She

boldly struts up to the checkpoint, not slowing her pace despite the demands of the IDF soldiers, removes her sunglasses to look the soldiers in the eye as she continues, walks past the dumbfounded soldiers, and strides into Israel as the guard tower collapses behind her. The experience of occupation in Palestine, in and of itself, is not one to which much of the world can relate; however, many people, from many different cultures, can relate to the need to overcome obstacles to be with a loved one. Many people, from many different cultures, can relate to the need to overcome oppression or an injustice of some sort. Many people, from many different cultures, can also empathize with the elation of overcoming oppression, obstacles, or other injustices to achieve their goals, and it is these near universal emotions that Suleiman evokes in his films.

In addition to incorporating universal themes and experiences throughout his work, Suleiman also uses humor as a universal language. He points out that, though there are differences in audience responses to his films at various screenings, everyone laughs at the same times in the films regardless of language and culture ("Elia" 219-20). The humor in Suleiman's films transcends language and cultural boundaries, at least in part, because it is less dependent on language for its effects. The majority of the humor in Suleiman's films derives from physical and situational humor rather than linguistic acrobatics. Rather than using witty repartee, verbal irony, or plays on words, Suleiman's humor is produced by the absurdity of the situations in which his characters find themselves and their blasé responses to those situations. The humor of a tank exploding after being struck with a peach pit can be understood without references to language or cultural idiosyncrasies.

Despite his belief in the goodness and universality of film, however, Suleiman does not seek to force a perspective or interpretation on his viewers—quite the opposite, in fact.

One of the hallmarks of his films is that they are brimming with ambiguity. Suleiman tells Butler that he does not seek to answer questions, but to raise them. He wants to open a multiplicity of readings in his films ("Interview: The Occupation" 65). Suleiman uses a number of techniques that allow for multiple readings of his film. His humor is often as tragic as it is comic, and the loosely connected vignettes that comprise his films lack explanation and create gaps for the viewer to fill. Even his film style is designed to create questions and speculation for his viewers. He tells Said that his frequent use of a wide angle lens and audio from outside the frame is specifically for the purpose of allowing his audience to question the boundaries of the frame and create multiple meanings. Suleiman argues that not narrowing the shot and hinting that there is always something outside of the frame with the surrounding sounds allows the readers to imagine life and events beyond the frame of the camera (Suleiman "Zero" 18).

Unlike Khleifi and Nassar, Suleiman did not receive any formal training, though his independent studies and extensive travel in the US and Europe exposed him to many different types of film. Like most accented filmmakers, his geographical location often seems to dictate his funding options. Though he spent a decade in the United States and several of his early short films drew on US funding, his only full length feature film that drew upon financial support from the US was *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. As Suleiman settled first in Jerusalem, then in Paris, his global-national-local nexus became situated more in France than the US. In terms of finance- and technoscapes, despite limitations on funding and difficulties in physically filming that were similar to earlier directors, Suleiman's films were quite successful in the international film circuits, allowing him to build from earlier successes, and making acquiring resources for later projects somewhat easier. In terms of media- and ethnoscapes, his films also experienced a far

wider distribution and reached a broader audience than most of the films of earlier directors like Khleifi, Masharawi, and Nassar.

Chronicle of a Disappearance (1996), Suleiman's first feature film, was primarily funded and supported by French and Israeli funds with additional production support from the European Union and United States. Acquiring funding for *Chronicle of a Disappearance* was less difficult for Suleiman than gathering funds for some of his other films because he was living in the US at the time and was generally treated as an American filmmaker (Suleiman "A Breakdown").

Chronicle of a Disappearance is the only film for which Suleiman requested and accepted money from the Fund for the Promotion of Quality Israeli Films (FPQIF), and he later immensely regretted the decision. Though Ali Nassar was the first "Israeli-Arab" to receive funding from the FPQIF, the number of Palestinian filmmakers whose projects were awarded funding from FPQIF were few and far between. Suleiman was one of the first Arabs to be awarded a grant from the FPQIF; however, the FPQIF did not approve of the final product and attempted to force Suleiman to repay the grant. In an effort to recoup their lost funds, the FPQIF sued Suleiman, only dropping the suit in embarrassment after *Chronicle of a Disappearance* won the award for Best First Film at the Venice Film Festival (Suleiman "Zero" 18). Suleiman recounts his experience in a discussion with Erikson:

It was a big fight for me to get this money. They had never really sponsored an Arab or Palestinian film. For me, it was a civil rights fight. I wanted to fight that kind of apartheid. Finally I got the money, but they didn't want to give me an entire grant. They wanted to give me only a little bit because I'm an Arab and thought I would shut my mouth. They hated the film entirely, and when I got the prize for best first film in Venice in 1996, they said I got the prize only because I'm an Arab. That was my fight with the Israelis. (Suleiman "A Breakdown")

He was also heavily criticized by the Arab world for accepting money from the Israelis for the project. His acceptance of FPQIF funding coupled with the closing scene of the film resulted in a

boycott from most of the Arab world (Gertz and Khleifi 41-2). Though Suleiman eventually won this finance battle, he refused to accept Israeli funding for his subsequent projects.

Like other Palestinian films, *Chronicle of Disappearance* seems to have been made for both Western and Arab audiences and its acceptance by and ability to reach those audiences varied. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* had a successful run on the film festival circuit and won a number of important festival prizes. Furthermore, it was also widely distributed for a Palestinian film, being picked up by several international distributors including International Film Circuit and Kino International. Western audiences generally approved of *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and it was, for the most part, hailed as a success. Suleiman attributes his ability to create a film about Palestine without eliciting much of the pro-Israeli rhetoric of the West to the unusual format of the film. Suleiman claims that the non-linear, open-ended format of the film gave spectators pause about exactly what was being said about Israel and Palestine, and therefore, hampered their ability to use "ready-made rhetoric" to immediately denounce the film (Suleiman "Seven"). Though the West had generally positive reviews of the film, critics from the Arab world were harsh. The film was boycotted and hailed as treasonous by the Arab world (Gertz and Khleifi 41-2). Much of the negative response in the Arab world centered upon the last image of the film. The final image of the film shows his parents, asleep in front of the television. The television itself is broadcasting an image of the Israeli flag as the Israeli national anthem plays. This image was, according to Suleiman, misinterpreted. He recounts:

I wanted to say we have been raped, we have the flag in our living room but we still don't pay it any attention And who understood this? The Israelis. One writer said this was the most painful image against the state of Israel that he'd ever seen. But the Arab press said, 'Why did he raise the Israeli flag? It's a form of surrender!' And then the film was tabooed in the Arab world" (Suleiman "Zero" 18).

These starkly different responses to this scene reflect the typical divide in audiences that Palestinian film makers must attempt to breach.

Suleiman's next film, *Divine Intervention* was not released until 2002. Finding funding for this project was quite different than for *Chronicle of a Disappearance* because Suleiman had since moved away from the US and did not want to rely on Israeli funds. The funds and production materials for *Divine Intervention* came primarily from French and German sources that Suleiman and his producer managed to cobble together as needed. He recounts that finding funding for his films was difficult, but was also made easier by the support from his production company ("A Breakdown"). Though he adamantly refused to repeat his experiences with the Israeli Film Fund, his producer, Avi Klienberger, was Israeli—a fact that greatly facilitated filming and moving across the borders (Gertz and Khliefi 43). In fact, when asked if he found it difficult to get permission to film in Israel and the West Bank, Suleiman replied "I didn't get any permissions myself. It was my head of production, an Israeli called Avi Kleinberger, who is a friend of mine. He set up an Israeli front company to make all the arrangements--they wouldn't have given permission to me" (Suleiman "Zero" 18). For Palestinian filmmakers, the acquisition of permits and filming locations is often made easier with the help of Israeli citizens. Though most Palestinian filmmakers make films that criticize Israel, the fact of Israel's control over the region is a reality that Palestinian filmmakers must often circumnavigate by whatever means available to them in order to make their films.

Many of the scenes in both *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention* are inspired by real events, and Suleiman often casts non-actors to portray those events. In fact, Suleiman claims that 90% of the people in the film are non-actors. He cast Israelis who had served in the IDF to play the soldiers, and the female lead, Manal Khader, is a journalist

(Suleiman "Elia" 220-1). Khadar actually inspired the fantasy scene in which her character crosses the border. Suleiman recounts "Manal and I had a rendezvous to have coffee in Jerusalem. She wanted to defy the checkpoint, and a soldier pointed a rifle at her. She said 'Go ahead and shoot, I'm crossing.' They didn't shoot. She is not an actress" ("Elia" 220). Suleiman's family members also play themselves in the film. The use of non-professional actors lends an air of reality to the film, which flirts with the line between fiction and documentary.

Physically filming *Divine Intervention* proved to be a difficult task. The West Bank was still in the throes of the second *intifada* when Suleiman filmed *Divine Intervention*, making movement difficult and security tenuous. Often, Suleiman found himself competing with the IDF for filming sets. He recounts that the IDF "were occupying our set and putting in their own sets. It's funny that cinema and war can compete in the same location. [...] Every time we moved to another location it was difficult" ("Zero" 18). The IDF and Israeli police destroyed several of their sets, and the checkpoint scene, originally slated to be filmed in Bethlehem, had to be moved because of the shooting and tear gas in the area (Suleiman "Zero" 18). He tells Brooks "Whenever we started shooting, they started shooting." Suleiman eventually had to resort to a method of filming in which he showed up to a set, filmed a scene quickly, then piled back into the van, moving on to the next set in order to avoid some of the trouble with the Israeli police and soldiers (Brooks). This type of almost guerilla-style filming works for a film like *Divine Intervention* since it is composed of a series of relatively short vignettes; however, filming a more narratively cohesive film that required consistency of set would have been nearly impossible under similar circumstances. Given the constraints of filming both in Israel and the West Bank at the time, the scene of the tank explosion actually had to be filmed in France

(Brooks). Filming an exploding tank in Israel or the West Bank was simply not possible for a Palestinian filmmaker at the time.

Despite the difficult filming conditions, the access to and distribution of *Divine Intervention* was surprisingly high, making its ethnoscape larger than many previous Palestinian films. *Divine Intervention* was popular on the international film circuit, winning the Judge's Choice Award at Canne's in 2002 (Gertz and Khliefi 43). The film was also picked up by a variety of distributors in the US and Europe, including video streaming services like *Netflix*. Although, trying to screen the film in the West Bank and Gaza presented significant difficulties because of the continuing *intifada*. When Suleiman brought *Divine Intervention* to Ramallah to show it at a local cinema, he found that the Israeli soldiers had recently bombed and ransacked the cinema. He recounts that "The Israeli soldiers destroyed all the places where culture was being presented" in the West Bank (Suleiman "Zero" 18). At the theater in Ramallah, Suleiman noticed that the soldiers had fired upon a row of mannequins and shot up a painting in the process. Before breaking into laughter, Suleiman tells Brooks "They executed a painting. [...] I thought that was so funny. I mean, it's depressing when you're there. I was in Ramallah only yesterday, and I was completely devastated. But we all have our own mechanism to lift us up again. Yesterday was a nightmare. Today I am laughing" (Brooks). Despite the difficulties with the *intifada*, Suleiman was eventually able to screen *Divine Intervention* in Ramallah and noted the difference in audience response, saying it "is the only place in all the screenings that I have attended that the audience begins to clap at the exact moment that Manal's foot crosses the checkpoint; for them it is a very intense and physical experience" (Suleiman "Elia" 220). In addition to the warm European reception, *Divine Intervention* was well received, for the most part, in both Israel (Suleiman "Zero" 18) and the West Bank (Gertz and Khliefi 43).

Suleiman's final installment of the trilogy, *The Time that Remains*, was released in 2009 and its technoscape and financescape primarily involved French sources with some contributions from Belgium and England. However, like many Palestinian filmmakers, Suleiman ran into unexpected troubles financing this film. After arranging a financial package for the film, the financing collapsed mere weeks before filming was set to begin (Suleiman "The Time"). Suleiman also indicated that there was a movement to quash the film entirely after the funding fell through. He claimed that the financiers who backed out then tried to prevent the film from being made entirely ("The Time"). After several months of unsuccessfully trying to raise the money to complete the film, his funding gap was closed by a London-based Saudi film enthusiast, Hani Farsi, and the French company, Wild Bunch (Suleiman "The Time"). Though *The Time that Remains* did not receive the same excited reception as *Divine Intervention* at the Cannes Film Festival, it was largely well received (Chahine). The film enjoyed a successful run on the international film circuit and was distributed widely in both the US and Europe. Like *Divine Intervention*, *The Time that Remains* was also made available to viewers through streaming services like *Netflix*, increasing ease of access to the film. Information on the availability of the film to audiences in Israel and Palestine was not available.

Elia Suleiman's personal style is consistent throughout his three films and is marked by wide angle lenses, meticulously composed scenes, extended silences, and disjointed narratives. Though seemingly counter-intuitive, his overwhelming preference for using wide angled lenses while filming in confined spaces contributes to the feelings of claustrophobia in the films. Wide angle lenses are often used in small spaces in order to open up those spaces and give the appearance of more space or distance between characters. Though Suleiman does use the wide angle lens to this effect as well, gesturing towards the isolated feeling many Palestinians have, he



Figure 10: Use of wide angle lens to create an isolated subject. From *The Time that Remains*.



Figure 11: Inclusion of boundaries to create claustrophobic feel with a wide angle lens (*Chronicle of a Disappearance*).

more often uses the wide angle lens to produce the exact opposite effect. By using a lens that includes larger areas of small spaces, Suleiman often incorporates the surrounding spatial boundaries of the room, such as doors, ceilings, floors, and window frames, in addition to his central subjects. Rather than making the spaces seem larger, the combination of lens and scene composition shrinks the space and demonstrates the tight confines of life in Nazareth or the West Bank. The two above still images from *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *The Time that Remains* are composed similarly and demonstrate

Suleiman's different uses of the wide angle lens. In both images, ES's mother sits alone, slightly right of center with the floor and three walls included in the shot. The image from *Chronicle of a Disappearance* is filmed through a doorway, in a dark room that includes the normal clutter of a lived-in foyer—a table with decor, wall art, plants, curtains, rugs, cabinets. The framing of the shot through the doorway, with the door way visible on either side of the shot, makes the image seem confined and the space seem small. The image from *The Time that Remains*, however, includes a large window-like opening on the porch where ES's mother sits. This window allows light to permeate the scene and only one side of the shot is partially blocked by a wall, which opens the relatively uncluttered and undecorated space and makes ES's mother appear isolated within a cold, open space. Suleiman's consistent use of the wide angle lens to demonstrate the confines of Palestinians, both within Israel and the West Bank, also contributes to the themes of blocked and tight spaces within the film; however, because blocked and shrinking space is a theme that is common throughout most fictional Palestinian film, I will go into more detail about it in subsequent chapters.

Suleiman's strategic use of sound, or lack thereof, is also a hallmark of his works.

While Suleiman uses the wide angle lens and scene composition to include as much in the camera frame as possible, he also uses sound to extend the frame. He tells S.F. Said "Sound for me is very important because it gives the spectator a sense of what extends beyond the frame. It's a way to engage spectators and release their imagination" ("Zero" 18). He explains that, to him, the silence helps make room for the spectator to participate in meaning-making of the film ("Interview: The Occupation" 69). While the silences in the film may encourage spectators to make meaning beyond the frame of the camera, sound does much more than extend the frame and encourage audience engagement in Suleiman's films. Dabashi argues that the spatial and temporal rhythm in Suleiman's films hinges on the centrality of silence (154). In Suleiman's films, there is very little dialogue and the protagonist, ES, is completely silent. As a result, the sounds that are included in the films—the sparse dialogues and monologues, the ambient noise, and the music choices—are powerfully emphasized by the comparative silence. Because there is little, if any dialogue, the viewer hears the ambient noise of the film with unusual acuity, and any scenes with music or other loud noises become staccato within the rhythm of the film.

Perhaps Suleiman's most noticeable stylistic characteristic is his rejection of coherent linear narrative. For the philosophical reasons previously stated, Suleiman often approaches creating his films in a fairly unique way, which then results in a flexible, non-linear plotline. He describes his methods to Erikson:

I never really come to a film through the structure. I simply jot down notes and build a story through them. Then I compose a tableaux. When I get a tableau that stands by itself, it becomes an image. Later, when you shoot, there are a lot of ever-present possibilities. I write a very precisely structured script, but then I leave that work alone and start the process again. I want to avoid archiving images. I always want to make the creative process continue and not simply shoot what I've written on the set. (Suleiman "A Breakdown")

The result is typically a series of poignant, but loosely related images, some of which congeal to form a rough narrative. These narratives, however, are not, in general, the cohesive element of the films. The plotline does not function to connect all of the images into a coherent theme or message. Its primary goal is not to tell a story. Rather, the series of images within the films captures the simmering anger, claustrophobia, and absurdities of life as a third class citizen in Israel and life under occupation in the West Bank in a more abstract and diffuse way than linear narrative and, yet, leaves the spectator with a concrete impression of the Palestinian way of life under both internal occupation in Nazareth and external occupation in Palestine.

Though scholars take different approaches to analyzing Suleiman's characteristic narrative disjunctures, they frequently rely on two underlying concepts regarding the results of Suleiman's style: it is both deconstructive and revelatory in nature. Dabashi argues that Suleiman's fragmented structure works to discursively dismantle the colonial state and its violence (136), while Junka-Aikio claims that Suleiman's style is the result of an inability to visually represent a national unity or collectively articulate political unity in the face of the collapse of nationalist discourse (407) and Gertz and Khleifi claim that the structure of Suleiman's films contributes to the depiction of a, mostly, postmodern world in which the signifier has become detached from the signified, leaving a simulacral reality that consists of "disconnected fragments, with no unifying focal point" (183). These three authors are applying different theoretical models to Suleiman's work and these models lead to different implications that I do not mean to trivialize or oversimplify, but all three point to a very similar underlying phenomenon. Though they use different terminology to describe it, all three point to Suleiman's style as deconstructing concepts of the nation or the national homeland, and Junka-Aikio and

Gertz and Khleifi argue that the result of this deconstruction is the revelation of the impotence and fictive nature of Palestinian nationalist discourse.

Though the trend of narrative disjuncture continues in his later film, Suleiman's characteristic disregard for coherent narrative is somewhat attenuated in *The Time that Remains*. Like *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*, present time in *The Time that Remains* is always filmed in a series of vignettes that appear disjointed and only marginally connected; however, *The Time that Remains* presents an interesting contrast in that the narrative of the past, Suleiman's father's experience of the *Nakba*, is relatively coherent with a strong narrative thread. However, as Junka-Aikio points out, the narrative thread of this film is only coherent in the past. The style of the film reverts back to a disjointed, absurdist style that is typical of his other films when the setting shifts back to the present time (408-9). Suleiman clarifies the reasons for this in his interview with Khader, claiming:

I did not live through the events of 1948, but I heard the stories from my father. When he fell ill, I asked him to write those stories down, and he did. Throughout the making of the film, a central question I had was how to adopt someone else's writing having not lived through the events myself. Should I still approach them on the premise that I have my own style and way of seeing things? I had a lot of questions about the narrative structure. As far as I was concerned, you couldn't tell the story of what happened in Nazareth in 1948 any other way. Fuad's story had to be told using linearity. ("*The Time*").

However, he did not fully surrender to linearity in the film, and as Fuad's memories begin to cross with his own, Suleiman began to work more and more in his personal style (Suleiman "*The Time*"). Because it is so distinctive, his style also contributes to the development of several unique themes across the body of his work including the prevalence of dark humor, an irreverence for traditional symbolism, and an emphasis on silent observation and the inability to articulate. Each of these themes, furthermore, emphasizes the deconstruction and devaluation of national discourse that the overarching structure of the film initiates.

In all three films, Suleiman employs a fairly classic version of dark comedy. There is little consensus on an official definition of humor, much less one of dark humor. Though the terms “dark humor” or “dark comedy” do not possess definitive, universal definitions within the literature (O’Neill 80), almost all definitions include humor that is ironic, absurd, or satirical, making Suleiman’s films an easy fit for the genre. Dabashi describes Suleiman the process at the heart of Suleiman’s dark comedy succinctly:

What we witness in Elia Suleiman’s cinema is the precise critical moment when the depth of tragedy mutates into the height of comedy, comedy meets absurdity, and then absurdity remember the dark dread at the heart of its own memory of the terror it must, and cannot but, remember. (Dabashi 135).

O’Neill argues that black humor is based on two elements: (1) the comic treatment of the tragic or that which resists comic treatment and (2) the reader’s recognition that this treatment is the expression of disorientation rather than simply a desire to shock. The concept of disorientation and entropy is central to O’Neill’s definition of dark humor and Colletta agrees that “dark humor suggests that there is really only established disorder. Sometimes it examines alienation and absurdity through the intensely subjective individual perceptions of characters, but more often it makes an aggressively objective evaluation of chaos and fragmentation” (Colletta 10). Operating from these assumptions, the Palestinian context is rife with opportunity for dark humor as many Palestinians struggle to find and maintain some semblance of order in their daily lives under occupation, whether internal or external. Suleiman offers an objective evaluation of the chaos of life under occupation by disorienting the tragic elements of that life though presenting them in ways that highlight the absurdities to the point of humor.

Suleiman’s dark humor highlights the disorder of life under internal and external occupation through the careful juxtapositions of various scenes and events. Though Sueliman’s films present the life and experiences of occupation through a single character, ES, and the films

treat intensely personal subject matter for the director, the construction of the films and ES's perpetual silent observation pushes his films more into the realm of objective rather than subjective evaluation of the chaos that infuses Nazareth and the West Bank. Both Dabbashi and Gertz and Khleifi compare Suleiman's ES to Naji al-Ali's Hanzalah (160-1; 41). Al-Ali, a Gazan satirist who grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon and was murdered in the late 1980s, was famous for his political cartoons that usually included an image of Hanzalah, a child from the refugee camps, with his back to the viewer, silently witnessing the violence and trauma depicted in the cartoon. Like Hanzalah, ES is a semi-autobiographical character and remains, always, a silent observer of the trauma that surrounds him. This insistence on silent observation maintains a lens of at least seeming objectivity, despite the personal, biographic nature of portions of the film. By emphasizing ES's, and thereby Elia Suleiman's, role as observer rather than actor in the chaos and disordered events of the films, Suleiman's films are able to remain scathing critiques of both the Israeli occupation as well as some Palestinian social norms while simultaneously demonstrating the tragic absurdity inherent in Palestinian life in Israel and under occupation.

Dark humor, however, does not purely demonstrate disorder and hopelessness, though those are often featured characteristics of the genre. O'Neill claims that the most important aspect of dark humor is that "it allows us to envisage the facelessness of the void and yet be able to laugh rather than despair" (100). He goes on to explain that though dark humor comes in many forms and elicits a varying degree of laughter, "in the end—we do laugh, and while we laugh there's hope" (100). Similarly, Colletta points out that "the dark comedic imagination casts off pain and suffering and refuses them their power to overwhelm and destroy" (7). Both O'Neill and Colletta agree that resistance to the disorder and hopelessness presented in literary dark comedies is central to any definition of dark comedy. Despite the blackness in dark comedy,

there must also be an element of hope, and Suleiman's films demonstrate that despite the bleak circumstances and outlook of life under occupation, there is still a spark of hope, however small, fleeting, or fantastic. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, for example, Adan, despite the difficulties she faces throughout the film, is eventually able to thwart the Israeli police and escape punishment for her prank. Dabbashi describes Suleiman's comedy as "'the precise critical moment when the depth of tragedy mutates into the height of comedy, comedy meets absurdity, and then absurdity remembers the dark dread at the heart of its own memory of the terror it must, and cannot but, remember" (135). The explosion of the tank in *Divine Intervention* is a good demonstration of this pattern. The explosion is bracketed by the mundane on one end—ES is simply driving in his car, eating a peach—and the tragic on the other—the scene that follows the explosion takes place in the hospital where ES's father is ill. Between the mundane and the tragic is the comedic absurd, the fantasy of wish-fulfillment. Colletta argues that dark comedy's hope is only fleeting, and in the case of Suleiman's films, such a statement would seem predominantly correct. Most of the hope inspired by the two later films stems from the fantasy scenes. In *Divine Intervention*, for example, the exploding tank, ES's girlfriend transgressing the border, and the iconic ninja scene are all fantasies that are later muted by the tragedies of life under occupation. However, Colletta does point out that "If humor can no longer be used for a moral purpose, it can be employed as a defense and a weapon, a formula of personal survival that suspends the consciousness of death and dissolution and strengthens, if only momentarily, a hold on life." (Colletta 7). Suleiman himself sees his comedy in such a light and tells Jason Wood:

I like the fact that you describe the humour in my film as subversive. Historically, there is something resistant about humour and even if talking in terms of a wider discussion of just my film, when people live for instance in a ghetto and when they produce black humour, irony, etc I think this is a way to deter finality in some respects and I think this is a way of producing hope. I think humour can be a

poetic sight with a poetic dimension and this is something that cannot be captured by the dominant order" ("Elia" 217).

The peach pit scene, for example offers a momentary escape, a small victory and tiny celebration for Palestinians under occupation through the destruction of the Israeli tank. Though Colletta would argue that such a moment of dark humor is essentially politically and ethically useless (11), I would have to disagree. Many types of comedy, satire and irony in particular, have a long history of political engagement and subversion. Dark comedy, through its very subversion of the tragic, demonstrates the resilience of the human psyche under suffering. In a situation such as the Palestinians', reframing and re-presenting the Palestinian narrative of history and daily life is a central political cause relating to issues of (in)visibility and resistance through *sumud*.

Suleiman's films not only demonstrate the daily practice of *sumud* through its depictions of mundane, daily life in Nazareth and the West Bank, but also bring visibility not only to these mundane activities, but also to their absurdity. Through his carefully crafted dark comedies, Suleiman rearticulates the discursive narrative of everyday life in the West Bank and Nazareth. This re-presentation of the Palestinian story for a wider, world audience is far from politically insignificant. By relying on dark comedy throughout his films, Suleiman is able to highlight the absurdity of life under occupation while offering a new view of how life in the West Bank and Nazareth is lived—one that contrasts the views put forward by traditional Palestinian dramas, tragedies, or documentaries of a beleaguered and besieged Palestinian people striving for an independent nation or those put forward by mainstream Hollywood films of Palestinians as villains and terrorists who threaten Israel's national stability.

Suleiman's dark comedy further functions to undermine concepts of nationalism in general and Israeli and Palestinian nationalism in particular through its exposure of the inconsistencies and absurdities in Nazareth and the West Bank. The world of Suleiman's films

demonstrates a barely-held-together society, functioning under absurd life conditions that elicit absurd reactions from the population. His emphasis on dis-ordering the supposed order of occupation and nationalism dismantles the carefully constructed appearance of stability that Israeli discourses of occupation and nationalism seek to convey. The discourses surrounding the Israeli occupation that seek to justify its continued existence center upon ideas of national security, predominantly through a secured border. Suleiman's films, however, expose just how flimsy and porous these supposedly secure borders actually are and how arbitrarily they are run. *Divine Intervention* is the best example of his critique of the borders simply because so much of the second half of the film takes place at the Al-Ram checkpoint. Through ES and his girlfriend, the viewer observes IDF soldiers asking drivers in the passing cars nonsensical questions, detaining people for no apparent reason, and arbitrarily closing the checkpoint. However, ES is able to subvert this checkpoint simply by releasing a red balloon with Yasser Arafat's image emblazoned upon it into the air. As the balloon floats past the checkpoint tower, the guards are so distracted by this "threat" that they do not notice ES and his girlfriend driving across the checkpoint.

His condemnation of Israeli national discourses is similarly scathing. He undermines concepts of Israeli nationalism and national identity by his inclusion of scenes such as the scene in *The Time that Remains* in which a young ES is forced to learn and sing the Israeli national anthem in his all Arab school in Nazareth. This scene undermines Israeli nationalism by demonstrating the lack of unity within the state through the presence of so many Arabs in the "Jewish" state and also demonstrates the frailty of Israeli nationalism by its need to begin indoctrinating children at such a young age. Palestinian nationalism does not escape Suleiman's darkly comedic eye, though his treatment of the Palestinian national discourse is perhaps a bit

more subtle and branches across films. It is perhaps most clearly seen in *Divine Intervention* through a series of vignettes that are funny, but, at the same time, demonstrate the unraveling of Palestinian social fabric that Fatah's nationalist discourses have been unable to prevent. These scenes demonstrate the hostility between Palestinians: people rip off license plates when a neighbor refuses to move the car, neighbors throw trash in each other's yards, "collaborators'" homes are targets for violence, crotchety old men tear up soccer balls that are accidentally kicked onto their roofs. Rather than explicitly condemning Palestinian nationalism directly, Suleiman uses these darkly comical vignettes to demonstrate the ways in which Fatah's discourses of nationalism have failed the Palestinian people and the simmering anger that has developed as the result of its dysfunction. By choosing absurdity and comedy to demonstrate the hollowness of the discourses of occupation and nationalism, Suleiman forces these discourses into the realm of the absurd—of the almost unbelievable—and begs the question as to why anyone would believe such ideologies in the first place. His dark humor makes adhering to and supporting discourses of occupation or nationalism not just immoral or impractical, but ridiculous—even silly—which is something that documentary and drama do not typically do.

One of Suleiman's most effective tools in creating both humor and undermining the ideology of nationalism is his heavy use of traditional symbols in an ironic way. Bresheeth treats Suleiman's use of symbols as a type of liminality—the symbols occupy a space between their traditional meaning and reality. Often, the characters do not recognize the difference between a symbol, like the grenade lighter in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, and its reality, the fact that it is a lighter and not a grenade. This idea carries throughout his body of work (76-7). However, both Junka-Aikio and Gertz and Khleifi argue that Suleiman's use of symbolism actually works to undermine or nullify the once potent symbols. Junka-Aikio argues that his use of symbols

exposes the degree to which they are just that: empty symbols that no longer hold the power to unite the people behind them. She claims "these symbols are exposed as [...] mere representations, signs that might have steered every day experience at some point of the Palestinians struggle, but that do so no more" (405). While Gertz and Khleifi may agree with Junka-Aikio to a certain degree—they claim that Suleiman's use of symbols does function to detach the common symbols from their original signifier—they also argue that his use of symbolism functions to reassign meaning to the now deflated symbols. They argue that "although Suleiman exposes [...] the fictitious status of these symbols through the use of parody, absurdity, and humor, he also searches for the truth behind them and renews their lost significance" (180). In *Divine Intervention*, Suleiman uses almost every major national symbol of Palestine: the kufiyah, Arafat, a map of Palestine, a Jerusalem city scape (including the Dome of the Rock), etc. By unceasingly forcing these national signifiers into the realm of the absurd and consequently divorcing them from their prior signifieds, he demonstrates the arbitrariness not only of the symbol, but also of the nationalism which it signifies.

In addition to collapsing nationalist symbols, Suleiman's films also regularly incorporate pointed silences. While silence is an aesthetic choice for Suleiman, it also produces powerful themes of resistance and inarticulation that are unique to his films. Suleiman claims that the silence was not meant to achieve a specific end. Suleiman admits that, at first, he did not know what the silence did in his films. He posits that his frequent use of silence likely has to do with death and that

"there is also the fact that in silence there is a vacuum, and that this vacuum, this empty space, is the potentiality of filling the blank, which in turn raises the question of what is to be filled in the blank. In other words, not too much polluted rigor or speech or that which can be preachy to the spectator, and thus the spectator has that editative capacity or role or space to actually fill in or participate with the image" (Suleima in Dabashi 154).

Suleiman, as a filmmaker is more interested in how the silences allow his reader to make various meanings from his films. Though, after being asked if the silence in his films is a form of resistance and after discussing the importance of always defining and redefining various means of resistance so they do not become stale or, worse, just counter-aggressions, Suleiman does agree that "silence can destabilize a certain microcosm of power. And that is the poetic also. I have faith that the poetics do have a role in destabilizing poles of authority" (Suleiman "Sad Times" 44).

Despite Suleiman's own feelings on the matter, scholars predominantly focus on the silence in Suleiman's films as a struggle and failure to articulate. Gertz and Khleifi argue that "the silence, the absence of a voice, the impossibility of telling any story let alone that of the film he is making, then are repeated in Suleiman's films in different contexts--and in all instances there remains a doubt as to whether the speaker is, indeed, mute or perhaps it is his audience who are deaf" (176-7). Both the struggle to speak and the struggle to be heard are prominent obstacles in the Palestinian struggle, as with any colonized population. Suleiman visually represents this struggle through ES's persistent silence. Bresheeth claims that in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, "Through the speechless Suleiman, his father, cousin, and friends, a certain feature of Palestinian reality, a reality of being throttled, of being silenced, is being spoken here by passages of expressive silence" (75). Bresheeth links ES's silence to Freud's melancholia: "for people affected by deep melancholia lose their --voice they no longer are able to speak for themselves, as their main argument is *against* themselves" (79). Though Junka-Aikio eschews the connections to melancholia and psychoanalysis, she describes a similar phenomenon of in-articulation. According to Junka-Aikio, Elia Suleiman's films represent the "impossibility of hegemonic political articulation" (405) after the failure of nationalism and Western

Humanitarianism through ES's silence. She claims that “amid the impossibility of collective articulation, amidst implosive communal and social relations and the loss of words and signs through which to articulate resistance, Suleiman’s films recognize that a return to old paradigms of resistance is not viable, and try to identify space for new openings” (411). Though these readings of Suleiman’s silences are not necessarily in steep disagreement with one another, I find Junka-Aikio’s interpretation to be the most productive in light of the fact that Suleiman’s narrative disjunctures, humor, and treatment of symbolism all function to destabilize traditional Palestinian national discourse.

Suleiman possesses one of the most unique and easily identifiable filmic accents of Palestinian filmmakers who are still working today. His distinctive style of near-silent, non-linear narratives and wide angle lenses make his films visually and aurally distinctive while his use of dark comedy, symbolism, and silent characters function to undermine national narratives in a way that is unique to his work. Though his films also participate in many themes and stylistic choices that firmly identify them as part of the broader body of Palestinian film, Suleiman’s films are unlike any other Palestinian feature, fictional filmmaker at this time.

Hany Abu Assad: High Risk, High Reward Filming

Like Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad took a different trajectory than previous filmmakers with his fictional films. Abu Assad was born in 1961 to relatively prosperous parents in Nazareth. His family was in the transportation business, which put him squarely in the middle class (Rich 29). Unlike many Palestinians, Abu-Assad was exposed to films and cinema at a young age. He recounts his first trip to the cinema with his uncle at the age of four in an interview with Ruby Rich:

I had never seen television before that, so it was my first experience of a moving image. It was a Western, and I felt the horses were so real, as they came towards the camera, that I hid under the chair. After the movie, I went behind the screen to see where the horses were. Then every Sunday we would see two movies on one ticket as children. Everyone would be there, all the boys of the city, fighting for a place in line to get the best seat. The excitement inside, when Charles Bronson would get revenge, was just like what the girls would experience when they saw the Beatles. In Nazareth in 1965, as a young man, I discovered a passion for the language of cinema and saw Westerns, Egyptian dramas, Indian musicals, Turkish melodramas, and later, lots of Kung Fu movies and Bruce Lee" (Abu Assad qtd. in Rich 29).

Despite his early love of film, family pressure and expectations pushed him to initially pursue a more obviously utilitarian occupation. In 1981, at the age of 20, Abu Assad moved to the Netherlands to study engineering and aeronautics. While in the Netherlands, he briefly worked as an aircraft engineer and, more importantly, not only rediscovered his love of film but also, found hope in the possibility that he, a Palestinian, could be a successful filmmaker after viewing a Michel Khleifi film (Bryant). He first stumbled upon the idea of becoming a filmmaker by trying to impress a girl in Holland. After telling her he was a filmmaker, he realized he needed to actually make a film. Though the relationship did not last, Abu Assad's newfound career did (Rich 29). He claims that he chose to work with film because film is what he was exposed to. He says that if he had been exposed to books, he may have become a writer or if exposed to a guitar, maybe a musician, but for him, it was always films as a means of expressing his angst and emotion (Abu Assad "This is a Film" 19). Upon moving back to Nazareth in 1987, he took a job with a television station (Bryant) and met Rashid Masharawi (Gertz and Khleifi 47). He and Masharawi then founded Aylul Films Production Company in 1990. While in Nazareth, he worked closely with Masharawi and was involved in several of Masharawi's films as an assistant director or producer (Gertz and Khleifi 47). In 1991, Abu Assad began directing films, himself. After deciding that filmmaking, rather than engineering, was his calling, he moved back to the

Netherlands in the mid-1990s and began sneaking into college film classes (Gertz and Khleifi 47). In 2000, he returned to Nazareth and began his film career in earnest.

Like Suleiman, Abu Assad is primarily self-educated in the realm of film. In addition to sneaking into classes in the Netherlands, Abu Assad attempted to further his film education by moving to the United States in the mid-2000s, after the success of *Paradise Now*; however, the fame and fortune he had anticipated did not follow, thanks in part to the 2007 Writer's Guild of America strike and the 2008 financial crisis (Cook). His time in American, despite the lack of immediate success, was not entirely in vain. Abu Assad recounts that "I learnt more in Hollywood in those four years than I did in the previous 25 years of filmmaking [...]. Success makes you blind, complacent. But in Hollywood I had to reconstruct my talent, my vision, my humanity. It taught me a lot" (qtd in Cook). After directing *The Courier*, a "B-movie pot boiler," Abu Assad realized that his inspiration was primarily drawn from the human realities of life under occupation (Cook), and he returned to Nazareth after only four years in Hollywood.

Because he spent an extended amount of time in both the US and Holland, Hany Abu Assad's global-national-local nexus consists primarily of Israel/Palestine, the Netherlands, and the United States, though he frequently receives financial and technical assistance from France as well. From the beginning, he has also been adamant about involving Palestinians and Palestinian sources of funding in his projects, finally reaching his goal of having an entirely Palestinian-funded film with *Omar*. His connections to the United States particularly seem to influence his aesthetic style and contribute to his popularity and wide distribution. Unlike Khleifi's lyrical art-house style or Suleiman's disjointed experimental style, both of which have had moderate success on the world stage, Abu Assad's style is far more mainstream-Hollywood, often drawing on familiar tropes from various popular genres.

Abu Assad's earliest feature film, *Rana's Wedding* (2002) was also his commercially least successful, though it was still successful by Palestinian-film standards. It was primarily funded by Palestinian money through the Palestinian Film Foundation, but is listed as a co-production with Augustus Films, an American company. It was filmed in East Jerusalem and Ramallah during the second *intifada*, which presented a significant number of obstacles for filming. Abu Assad insisted on filming in the West Bank despite the restricted access to the Occupied Territories because of the *intifada*. As a result of the travel restrictions, which would not allow private vehicles to enter the West Bank, Abu Assad and his production crew were forced to travel to and from Ramallah via Ford Transits, which, ironically, are also the vehicles used to transport Palestinians to work in Israel (Gertz and Khlieifi 48). Their troubles, however, did not stop there. On the first day of filming, an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) team halted filming after seeing Palestinians wearing border guard uniforms and carrying weapons. It took several hours to resolve the confusion, during which time, "the real border guard soldiers fixed the actors' uniforms, and one of the soldiers even scolded a Palestinian actor whose shoes were not properly polished" (Gertz and Khleifi 48). Though Abu Assad tried not to let the difficulties of shooting or the general mood in the country at the time impact his film, he admits that he could not avoid at least some influence from the *intifada*. He tells Sabah Haider:

For sure the intifada influenced the production because at the end of the film, reality is stronger than fiction. The occupation, the checkpoints — you don't want them to interfere with your story but the ugliness of occupation influenced the look of film. As much as you might not want occupation to influence the making of the film, at the end it does influence it. (Abu Assad "Palestinian Cinema")

Indeed, one can see the ugliness of occupation throughout *Rana's Wedding*. The dilapidated buildings, the home demolitions, the funeral processions, and the sense of paranoia pervade the film and are unavoidable.

For his earlier films—fiction and documentary alike—Abu Assad faced problems similar to the early filmmakers in reaching an audience. He points out the difficulty in reaching a Palestinian audience in particular in his interview with Haider, claiming that

The problem with our cinema is that we don't have [our] distribution channels to our people. Every nation has its own distribution channels to its people but we don't have that — we are relying on other channels, but we can't massively achieve that. ("Palestinian Cinema")

Though distribution in the West Bank and Gaza continues to be a problem, *Rana's Wedding* did achieve attention and awards from international film festivals and was released for distribution in the United States, Germany, France and the Netherlands, though information on audience response to the film is sparse.

Paradise Now is, by far, Hany Abu Assad's most successful film and, arguably, the most successful fictional Palestinian film to date. Because of its success and the controversy surrounding its subject-matter, suicide bombing, there is also a plethora of information available about its creation. *Paradise Now* included funding or technical assistance from such diverse organizations and countries as the World Cinema Fund, Germany, the United States, Amsterdam, and France. Llama Films, an Israeli production house that focuses on socially, politically, or culturally significant films, was also involved in the production. According to Abu Assad the Dutch came on board for the film first, then Lama (Israel) then the Germans and then the French (Celluloid Dreams and Lumen Films) ("Q&A" 4). The crew itself consisted of Palestinian, Dutch, German, French, Belgian, Israeli, and British persons ("Q&A" 4) and was unusually large for a Palestinian film. When asked why he had such a large crew, Abu Assad responded that he "had three production companies involved. Each operated under a system where your financing requires you to have people from the country involved. Safety and presence were not factors" ("This is a Film" 19). The size of his production crew, however, became a liability during

filming because it prevented them from being able to move quickly from place to place, making it more difficult to avoid issues with the battling Palestinian factions (Abu Assad "Q&A" 5). Despite the inclusion of a security department that advised them on the safest ways to proceed with filming, Abu Assad's insistence on using authentic locations in Nablus eventually put the cast and crew in too much danger to finish the film in Nablus.

Most of the decisions Abu Assad made while filming *Paradise Now* can be attributed to his insistence on authenticity in the film. He did extensive research for the film including reading reports and interviewing those who had known or worked closely with suicide bombers (*"Paradise Now"* 59). He chose to shoot on 35mm rather than digital, though digital would have been easier, in order to create a distinction between it and the news footage about Palestine that is always shown through the lens of a shaky digital camera (Abu Assad "Q&A" 6). He claims that he thought about using digital at first but chose 35mm because in the future, if the shaky digital camera becomes divorced from a sense of "reality" in film, 35mm can capture color and depth better and may seem more real (Abu Assad "This is a Film" 19). Though relatively little of the film is set at the automotive repair shop where Said and Khaled work, Abu Assad also insisted that the two actors, Kais Nashif and Ali Suleiman respectively, spend two months of the pre-production period working as mechanics in Nablus (*"Paradise Now"* 59; Abu Assad "Q&A" 4). Though the choice to use 35mm and train the lead actors in mechanics likely did not add any danger to the cast and crew, the unfortunate side effect of insisting on authenticity through filming on location, in this instance, is that the location, Nablus during the second *intifada*, was authentically dangerous for a multinational film crew.

Abu Assad and his crew were not unaware of the dangers of filming in the West Bank. Abu Assad originally wanted to film in Gaza, but Gaza in the early 2000s was too volatile

(Dabashi "Paradise Delayed"). However, Nablus, though perhaps calmer than Gaza, presented security problems from the beginning. Abu Assad recounts that "In order to enter Nablus, all were obliged to sign a document stating that if Israeli troops shot them, they were responsible for their own deaths" ("*Paradise Now*" 58). He claims the real danger while filming was from the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) missiles, which he and the crew could not see coming. However Israeli troops were only a portion of the problems the film crew faced as obtaining access to Nablus required cooperation with the IDF, but surviving once inside Nablus required cooperation with the various Palestinian factions within the city. Complicating matters further, the Palestinian factions were not only at war with the IDF, but were also in competition with each other. Abu Assad recounts the situation:

At day-break the invasion starts with tanks rolling in, gunshots and rocket attacks and in the evening there is a curfew. We had to report our whereabouts to these armed Palestinian factions behind the backs of the Israeli Army, without the Israeli army knowing we were in contact with the Palestinians, because getting in and out of Nablus was difficult enough as it was. On top of this, the rivalry between Palestinian factions meant approval from one faction and meant definite disapproval from the other." (Abu Assad "Q&A" 5)

The forced interactions with the Palestinian factions was not without its benefits, though it also presented dangers. The supportive factions helped Abu Assad achieve the authenticity he was seeking in his film. The scene in which Khaled films his martyr's video was filmed in a location where real martyrs had filmed their videos and with actual suicide bombing organizers present. One of the organizers even stopped the filming to correct how Ali Suleiman was holding his gun, a gun that belonged to one of the faction members. Abu Assad notes that among these organizers, "there was no protest over the humor at all. Later I realized that in reality things like this happen. It wasn't irregular to them" (Abu Assad "Q&A" 6-7).

However, the groups who opposed the film created significant problems for Assad, the most serious being the kidnapping of his location manager, Hassan Titi. The same day as the kidnapping, there was a missile attack nearby, and six European crew members quit, creating both technical and budgetary problems for Abu Assad. He thus had the trouble of how to get his location manager back, how to satisfy the various Palestinian groups without risking angering the Israelis, and how to find six new professional crew members. With the help of Yasser Arafat, Abu Assad was able to secure the release of his location manager, but the problem of whether to stay or leave presented further complications. He recounts that

If we left, we would justify the rumors that we were traitors. That would leave Hassan and the rest of our local crew who we would have to leave behind, as well as the factions that were on our side, in big trouble. If we stayed, we would have to continue working in a war zone and stand up against the rival factions. I decided to stay. (Abu Assad "Q&A" 6)

However, his producer was adamant about leaving. Abu Assad suggested a compromise. He began a campaign to stymie the rumors; however, international journalists picked up the story of Hassan's kidnapping, which prompted the rival factions to begin a counter campaign. Abu Assad flew in new crew members and continued filming in Nablus for a time, but after a landmine exploded nearby, he was forced to move filming to Nazareth (Abu Assad "Q&A" 6). They spent fifteen days in Nazareth filming the remaining scenes. While these scenes were predominantly interior scenes, thus not suffering much from the change in location, they had to reconstruct the exterior of Said's and Khaled's houses (Abu Assad "Q&A" 4-5). Despite the difficulties in filming—or perhaps because of them—Abu Assad was able to film and present an “authentic” representation of the final twenty-four hours of a suicide bombers' existence in *Paradise Now*. The next hurdle for Abu Assad and *Paradise Now* took on a more international flavor.

Given its festival success but controversial topic, distribution proved tricky for *Paradise Now*. Abu Assad admits that “when he heard Warner Independent wanted to distribute his film, he thought someone was playing a joke on him” (Twair and Twiar). Warner Independent was, by far, the largest and most Hollywood-connected distributor to take interest in a fictional Palestinian film up to that point in time. Furthermore, not only did Warner Independent buy the distribution rights for *Paradise Now* in the United States, but they also resisted both national and international campaigns to ban the film (“*Paradise Now*” 58). Mark Gill, president of Warner Independent told a film festival audience that when Warner acquisitions executive Paul Federbush bought a print of the film, it was presumed he would simply bury it in “Jewish Hollywood.” Gill praised Warner’s Laura Kim for backing the movie when she was bombarded by demands to cancel its appearance in theater chains” (Twair and Twair). Despite the controversy surrounding the film, *Paradise Now* was highly successful on the film festival circuit and enjoys the widest distribution, in at least 46 different countries (Matza), of any Palestinian fictional film to date.

Because *Paradise Now* received distribution throughout Europe, North America, South America, and Singapore, it is likely the most easily accessible Palestinian fictional film. Like most Palestinian films, *Paradise Now* received somewhat mixed reviews in the West; however, unlike other Palestinian films, the reviews of *Paradise Now* were more polarized. Those who like the film gave it the highest praise for its novel treatment of a difficult subject; those who did not like the film, accused Abu Assad of being a terrorist sympathizer and apologist. Though the minority of displeased critics were particularly vocal, *Paradise Now* was largely praised in the West and rewarded accordingly. It won the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film and was nominated for The Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award in 2006, the first Palestinian

film to achieve the honor. The Golden Globe and Oscar nomination catapulted the film into notoriety, likely increasing demand and, thereby, accessibility of the film. The film, however, was only screened at three small, art-house theaters in Israel (Matza), and most attempts at screenings met with considerable resistance from the Israeli political right (Khoury). The film was screened in Ramallah to mixed reviews from the Palestinian crowd. Like other Palestinian films, some thought it did not paint Palestinians positively enough, while others thought it was a fair treatment of the issue (Murphy)

After *Paradise Now*, Abu Assad moved to Hollywood, California to seek a career in the United States. However, his attempt was not successful, and the only film it produced, *The Courier*, is generally not considered a Palestinian film largely because it was financed, filmed, and produced in the United States, written and produced by Americans, and does not treat any Palestinian issues. The only criteria under which it could be considered Palestinian is that its director is a Palestinian which, for the purposes of this paper, is not enough. Because of the involvement of other film professionals, it would also not be fair to consider this film in a discussion of Abu Assad's cinematic accent, *The Courier* having too much influence from personnel other than the director to accurately be treated as an auteur film. *The Courier* aside, Abu Assad realized that his true cinematic inspiration was Palestine, and his subsequent films revisit the topic.

Paradise Now's success, in many ways, paved the way for Abu Assad's third, generally agreed to be Palestinian, film, *Omar*. Though *Omar*, like *Paradise Now*, is a thriller about the problems created by the occupation, it is unique in several ways, one of which is its funding. *Omar* is the first fictional film fully funded by Palestinians. However, it was not without its troubles. Waleed Zuaiter, who plays Rami, was actually the lead on finding funding for the film.

Though he initially secured enough funding to start the film, one of the financial backers dropped out, leaving a 25% gap in the film's budget. The crew continued working as Zuaiter scrambled to close the budgetary gap (Asfour). Abu Assad and Zuaiter co-founded Zbros, a Palestinian-American production company, for the purposes of financing *Omar*. Though the Enjaaz Fund from the Dubai International Film Festival provided \$100,000 for the post-production, the film's \$2 million budget was entirely comprised of money from Palestinian investors. Furthermore, Abu Assad also relied on Palestinian crew and filmed in the predominantly Palestinian cities of Nazareth and Nablus (Cook). *Omar* is the first feature film that cannot be accurately labeled with any other national moniker than "Palestine." The significance of *Omar*, as an entirely Palestinian-created film, marks a shift in Palestinian feature films and a step towards a goal that many previous Palestinian filmmakers have sought: a Palestinian film industry. Abu Assad explains to Johnathan Cook that "As Palestinians, we need a viable, creative and thriving film industry, and that's only going to be possible if investors see that they can get a return on their money." He adds that the reliance on foreign funding weakens the local film industry, not only because importing European crews negates the need to train and employ local crews, thus reducing the number of trained film professionals in the area, but also by cutting into the films' budgets. He explains that American funding is difficult for a Palestinian project to acquire and that European funding, though easier to obtain, comes with a set of demands. He recounts that, with European funding, "You have to employ Europeans on your crew, and their salaries, flights and hotels eat into the budget," he explains. "The money isn't there on the screen" (Cook), thus potentially creating lower-quality films.

Fortunately for Abu Assad, filming *Omar* was not the harrowing experience of filming *Paradise Now*. By 2013, the second *intifada* had abated, and the subject matter of *Omar* was

somewhat less controversial than that of *Paradise Now*. Even the Israeli authorities were more amicable for *Omar*'s filming. Abu Assad explains that "We managed to get permission [to shoot] for all of the places, even the wall. For the wall, we had permission to climb up to a certain height and then, for the moments at the top, we used a fake wall on a set in Nazareth" (Mendes 131). Despite the relative ease of filming, *Omar* was, in fact, inspired by Abu Assad's more difficult experiences filming *Paradise Now* in Nablus. According to Alexander, Abu Assad attributes his idea for *Omar* to the paranoia his film crew felt while filming *Paradise Now*. He told reporters that, while filming in Nablus, the crew became certain that there was a traitor among them, passing information along to the IDF. A friend later confessed to Abu Assad that Shin Beit, Israel's security service, pressured him into becoming an informant in order to prevent the release of sensitive information about his family (Alexander). The ease with which one can be pressured to inform on his friends thus became the topic of Abu Assad's subsequent project.

Perhaps the greatest challenge, though not a new one for Abu Assad, in filming *Omar* was working with inexperienced actors. Like those in *Rana's Wedding* and *Paradise Now*, many of the actors in *Omar* were new to the job, and, as in the prior two films, Abu Assad excelled in getting quality performances from the new actors. Abu Assad tells Garcia that

If you are an experienced actor, I can get you to a very emotional and honest point, but I will never get this virginity and purity of performance. [...] In acting, it is so beautiful to see that freshness, but young, inexperienced actors need rehearsals. I work a lot with them on trust. They must have that. Then, you push them into being emotionally naked, as Lubany is in the scenes with Omar near the end of the movie. (Garcia)

This use of untrained Palestinian actors and actresses is emblematic of Abu Assad's greater project of increasing the number of trained filmmakers and technicians in Palestine. He claims that "The goal is to assemble a stable of Palestinian directors over the next 10 years who will

collaborate and create a healthier Palestinian industry. We'll always be a small player, [...] but we can maximize our influence and ensure our creative independence" (Cook).

Omar had a highly successful run on the film festival and awards ceremony circuits, winning a number of prizes, including the *Un Certain Regard* jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival and being nominated for several other prestigious awards, including an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. It was even more widely distributed than *Paradise Now*, making it perhaps the most easily accessible Palestinian fictional film to date. It has been available on the US streaming service *Netflix* since its release. While several other Palestinian films have been offered through *Netflix*'s streaming service, including *Curfew*, *Haifa*, *Divine Intervention*, and *The Time that Remains*, only *Paradise Now* and *Omar* have enjoyed extended availability through the service, and *Paradise Now*'s availability has been sporadic. Because *Paradise Now* was so successful, *Omar* had greater ease of access to a much wider audience than most Palestinian films. Its mediascape, in other words, was larger and more varied than any other Palestinian film to date.

Unlike *Paradise Now*, *Omar* met most audiences with little, if any, resistance. Film critics largely rated it a successful film and international audiences at film festivals were likewise supportive. Though it had to be submitted to the Israeli censors first, like all films in Israel, *Omar* was shown in Israel as well as the West Bank. Abu Assad claims that "normal" (i.e. non-Palestinian, non-occupied persons) people were able to enjoy his films, but Palestinians, in general, did not care for them. He claims that Palestinians are, perhaps, too close to the subject matter which creates distance between them and his films (Abu Assad "Beauty"). Another difference in audience reception that the director notes is that people living in a free society read *Omar*, the character, differently than those living under limited political autonomy. He claims

that "People who live under the occupation feel there is hope in my movie, [...] "and those who have no experience with oppression feel that Omar is boxed in." (Garcia). These discrepancies in audience reception are not unusual or unexpected for films with international audiences in general and Palestinian films in particular. However, the roll that political autonomy plays in determining the perception of the film is yet another axis of Palestinian film's ethnoscape that is more prominent because of Palestine's position as an occupied land than it might be in, for example, a film produced in the US or Europe.

Though Abu Assad's films are complex and sophisticated thematically, his aesthetic style is less markedly unique than those of directors like Elia Suleiman or Michel Khleifi. Rather than rely on experimental or "high-art" style, Abu Assad employs a much more mainstream aesthetic approach to his films. The lighting and camera work are of generally high quality, and he uses a wide range of traditional cinematic techniques in all three films. However, *Rana's Wedding* does have a look and feel that is distinctly different from those of *Paradise Now* and *Omar*. This different look is primarily due to Abu Assad's use of lighting, gel filters or perhaps a post-production technique to create a warmer image, with ruddy red, brown and orange tones, than the cooler, more natural lighting in *Paradise Now* and *Omar*. One of the likely reasons for this less avant-garde style is his choice of genre.

Abu Assad grew up watching and being entertained by mainstream films from Hollywood, Egypt and India. Like many filmmakers, Abu Assad creates films that he, himself, would like to see. He tells Georgegakas and Salts that he doesn't "believe in an audience apart from yourself. You have a curiosity to know things and experience things better and then you want to share it with others. I don't have any particular audience. I have myself as an audience. I want to see this film" ("This is a Film" 17). However, Abu Assad does not simply draw upon

static genre structures and motifs. He employs and blends well known film genres in each of his films to create hybrid forms that better capture his subjects. There are elements of romance and road movies in *Rana's Wedding*; road movies and action thrillers in *Paradise Now*; and action thrillers and romance in *Omar*. Several critics argue that Abu Assad's use of familiar genres and scenes is precisely why his films have been so well received. Nashef claims that the reason *Omar* and *Paradise Now* did so well on the transnational scene is because they include and grapple with general, widely relatable scenes and characters (sympathetic mothers, rebellious teenagers etc). Aaron, it would seem, agrees, though he also brings up an important distinction in Abu Assad's and any accent filmmaker's work: the balance between using the dominant film industries and subverting them. In regards to the elements of the road movie and action films in *Paradise Now*, Aaron claims that "*Paradise Now* exploits such genres' universal appeal and mass audience. Some criticized *Paradise Now* for collapsing into such conventional tropes; yet the film remains in an active, outspoken, and self-conscious dialogue with Hollywood, with Israel, and with the West" (Aaron 87). Though Aaron's work does not treat Abu Assad as an accented filmmaker, specifically, it touches on one of the key facets of accented films: utilizing the tools and resources of the center to make films about the periphery, which could potentially subvert the center. Though many accented filmmakers use funds from the West to make films about the East, in loose terms, the ability of those films to subvert the dominant film cultures is usually limited by their lack of "success" in the center. Because of their success and wide availability, Abu Assad's later two films work to subvert, not only mainstream Hollywood filmmaking practices, but also Western perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general as a result of the content of the films.

Though *Rana's Wedding* differs somewhat from *Paradise Now* and *Omar* in its thematic content, it could be read as something of a precursor to trends that Abu Assad delves into more fully in *Paradise Now* and *Omar*. Specifically, Abu Assad's films tend to explore subjectivities that are unfamiliar, both to mainstream audiences as well as Palestinian audiences, and his films work to reclaim visual spaces and restore agency to Palestinian characters who are often depicted as passive victims of the occupation. Though Abu Assad's films are not so explicitly non-nationalistic as Elia Suleiman's or Annemarie Jacir's, they also do not follow the trends of Palestinian nationalist discourse and communal concern that earlier filmmakers set.

Each of Abu Assad's films attempts to highlight a particular characteristic of Palestinian society that is relatively unknown to the outside world and often unexplored by Palestinian society in general. *Paradise Now* and *Omar* treat particularly controversial subjectivities, suicide bombers and collaborators respectively, while *Rana's Wedding* examines the experience of *sumud* and the difficulties of existence and movement in the West Bank. The choice of subject matter and Abu Assad's tendency to choose characters who are in unusual situations stems from his personal approach to films in general. He claims that

Every human should be shocked watching a movie that lights dark places. Film is about allowing you to go to places you will never go, to be persons that you will never be. That is why we make films. You experience things you will never experience in life. You will know more when you leave than when you walked in. (Abu Assad "This is a Film" 17)

In his effort to light the dark places, Abu Assad does not focus on the horrors of the occupation as many earlier directors have. His focus is on the individual experiences of the characters. Gana posits that Abu Assad is less concerned with accurately displaying the horrors of occupation and more concerned with whether such atrocities can be sufficiently portrayed if the viewer is

willfully ignorant of them (Gana 29). In many ways, Said's, Khaled's, Omar's, and Rana's identity are examples of what Gana calls contested identities. She argues that

A contested identity is essentially an identity forced not only to despise itself but also, and whenever possible, to reduce itself to (the status of) nonexistence, or at least, of disposability--to liquidate or annihilate itself *tout court*. A contested identity is above all, an identity that is usurped from the otherwise inalienable right to re-present, assert, and liberate itself--that is, in many ways, to narrativize itself. (Gana 22)

Gana is working with White's distinction between narrate and narrativize. For White, to narrate simply involves recounting a series of events, while to narrativize involves linguistically shaping a series of events and presenting them in the form of a story with a discernable beginning, middle, and end (6). Gana uses the term in an attempt to indicate the difficulty with which individuals with contested identities struggle in order to tell their stories (22). Though Gana is only addressing the contested identity of suicide bombers in her article, Omar, a potential collaborator, undoubtedly fits Gana's description of a contested identity who lacks the ability to narrativize himself. In fact, Palestinian identity in general, such as that represented by Rana, has been systematically prevented from narrativizing its own history. The problems with narrativization are less complicated for those who work in fiction rather than history, but Abu Assad's focus on narrativizing contested identities is, at least thus far, a pillar of his filmic accent. Though his presentation of contested identities is consistent throughout his fictional films, there is a notable distinction between Rana, who can be said to represent a contested identity to some degree, and Said and Omar, who represent highly contested and often demonized identities.

In *Rana's Wedding*, Abu Assad draws attention to how various elements of existence under occupation have become normalized in Palestinian society. Though Rana is clearly bothered and frustrated by several facets of the occupation—the young boys throwing rocks at

the IDF, the martyr's funeral, the demolition of a Palestinian home, the difficulties of dealing with the Palestinian bureaucracy—she deftly navigates these situations in order to get married in time. The other characters that surround her are, generally, unperturbed by the goings on around them. When Rana watches the IDF demolish a house through her friend's window, she tells Samira “They are demolishing a house on the day I want to build one” and Samir replies flatly and without sarcasm, “Don't worry. Tomorrow, we'll rebuild it.” It is precisely this type of unimpassioned rejection of the occupation that Abu Assad portrays throughout the film, and it is this type of reaction to occupation that is often overlooked in Palestinian fictional film. There is no shortage of emotionally charged scenes of house demolitions, unjust road blockades, confrontations with IDF, or general frustrations with life under occupation. Samira's nonplussed acceptance of the everyday realities of life under occupation and her calm, matter-of-fact insistence that Palestinians will continue to exist and thwart the occupation is a less-demonstrated quality of Palestinian life in Palestinian fictional film.

Taking his interest in contested identities a step farther in *Paradise Now*, Abu Assad presents the viewer with an often seen but rarely explored identity: the suicide bomber. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, certain segments of Western society took issue with Abu Assad's humanistic presentation of suicide bombers. Unlike the Palestinian identity in general, which is part and parcel of several extent discourses in the West, suicide bombers, in general, are *persona non grata* in Western media and social discourse. Suicide bombers, particularly in the post-9/11 United States, are viewed as religiously fanatic monsters, not humans fueled by rational decision-making processes. Gana calls this tendency toward vilification the “differential allocation of humanity,” and her point on the matter is worth quoting at length. She argues that

only after recognizing that what is really at stake in *Paradise Now* is casting light on the differential allocation of humanity to some subjects and its denial to others

can we realize the real scare of those who were threatened by the outward humanization of suicide bombers: it is the fear that the film might disarticulate the exclusive assignation of humanity, extending it to those who are not its beneficiaries, even while they remain its tragic subscribers. [...] Narrative suicide bombing is threatening because it inscribes the suicidal act within a *historical continuum* of a people's struggle for self-determination. Insofar as it voraciously appropriates all concern away from the fundamental question of occupation, subtly displacing the Palestinian right to statehood, the controversy over the humanization of suicide bombers is derivative at best and dishonest at worst" (Gana 25).

In taking on such staunchly defended conceptions of an identity, Abu Assad narrativizes a taboo and complicates an identity stereotype that is tightly guarded in Western political and social discourse. His effectiveness in doing so lies, at least in part, in his refusal to participate in reinforcing those stereotypical images and narratives. Rich explains that Abu Assad "insisted on avoiding all the kinds of street-fighting-man footage that commonly turns up on the television news. In other words, he [...] refused to represent the outside surface of reality that in our time so insistently conceals the inner truths that shape such images" (Rich 29). Not only does he reject the stereotype visually by rejecting the shaky camera and street fighting, he also rejects the stereotype thematically by refusing to identify Khaled and Said as religious fanatics. Thomas (433), Rich (29), and Ramsey Kurz (228) all point out the significance of Khaled and Said's lack of religiosity, the fundamental characteristic of Western perceptions of suicide bombers, but, perhaps, Abu Assad himself explains it most directly, saying "the majority of people have one of two views on the suicide bombers: either the bombers are criminals or super-heroes. My film is about destroying those prevailing perceptions, those images, to build a new perception" (Abu Assad "This is a Film" 17).

Brand and Aaron both address Abu Assad's attempt to build a new perception; however, both readings are highly problematic. Brand argues that this new perception is based on the achievement of paradise through the identification with pure victimhood through Said's character (170), and Aaron argues that the entire structure of the film, and therefore this new perception of suicide bombers, is based on the structural positioning of coloniality in the center of a frame which converts the to-be-dead suicide bomber into the dead-already captive of the colonial present (54). Both readings focus exclusively on one small part of the film while disregarding other elements of the film that contradict their readings. Brand relies on the character of Said to the exclusion of the characters of Khaled and Suha, both of which serve a crucial role in offsetting Said's positioning of himself as the ultimate victim. While Said may surrender to victimhood—though, based on his monologue toward the end of the film, I would not call his identification with victimhood “pure” as does Brand—Khaled and Suha, both prominent characters, do not ultimately identify with victimhood. Khaled and Suha both accept that there are other, nonviolent means of resisting the occupation. In other words, they choose to accept and use what little agency they may have under occupation in order to nonviolently work towards a better future for Palestine rather than conform to the role of a victim and object of occupation whose only chance at agency is death and whose only hope is to die in order to perpetuate a seemingly endless violent resistance.

Aaron's argument, though interesting, is similarly flawed. Aaron claims that the structure of the film is centered upon coloniality, but this assessment is based on one scene, the final scene in which Said is on a bus, waiting to complete his mission. In the frame he is right of center, while an Israeli soldier is positioned in the center. However, though Aaron offers a thorough and convincing reading of this particular scene, extrapolating claims of coloniality beyond the final

scene is a bit of a reach. Throughout the film, Palestinians, not Israelis, dominate the center of the frame. In fact, Israelis only figure peripherally throughout the film and are rarely depicted as active colonial forces, the opening scene as Suha crosses into Nablus being a notable exception. In fact, there are several scenes in which Israelis are humanized far beyond the norm in Palestinian fictional films. One such example is the people Said encounters on the bus, once he has crossed into Israel and where he first considers detonating his device. The people on the bus are normal people—not military villains and this encounter gives Said pause.

Despite Brand and Aaron's attempts to almost exclusively situate Abu Assad's depictions of suicide bombers within the context of existing discourses, victimhood and colonialism, Said and *Paradise Now* successfully defy conventional representation of suicide bombers and, in so doing, open the reader to new possibilities for empathy and work to disassemble the identity of the martyr in Palestinian society. As Gana so eloquently puts it, *Paradise Now* "reopens the corridors of distant empathizing and shakes awake the intoxicating slumbering of our sobering imaginative impulses" (21). Both Khaled and Said are empathetic characters, despite their seeming commitment to a deed most audience members consider reprehensible. Both struggle with their decision throughout the film and ultimately switch rolls in terms of certainty and resolve. As a result, the viewer who hopes neither will follow through with the deed, first empathizes with Said as he grapples with his doubts and later empathizes with Khaled as he decides not to follow through with the bombing. Ramsey-Kurz describes this struggle for the viewer's identification (224) and it is precisely this struggle and the uncertainty that allows the viewer, whose initial tendencies would be to sympathize only with the doubting character, to question their assumptions about suicide bombers in general.

Paradise Now, according to Nashef, also debunks the myth of the martyrs through its non-stereotypical portrayal of Khaled and Said. The roll of suicide bombing is inextricably tied to that of martyrdom in most viewers' minds. Despite Said and Khaled's seeming lack of religiosity, both continue to participate in the cult of the martyr as the time for their mission approaches, and through his depiction of the machinations behind creating martyrs for the cause, Abu Assad shines a not-too-friendly light on a common practice. Thomas argues that suicide bombing simultaneously blurs and (re)inscribes the boundaries between global/local, life/death, ideological boundaries (ancient religion/modern secular). He adds that the "fault line [between the Real and Symbolic] is the proper domain of the suicide martyr—a line across which violent truths and glorious fantasies are traded like hostages" (432) and it is precisely this symbolic, fantastical side of this liminal identity that *Paradise Now* undermines. Brand argues that *Paradise Now* "intends to expose the conflation of sacrifice and victimhood or, more accurately, of the rhetoric and iconography of sacrifice and victimhood. This is black comedy at its best and black comedy is always the weapon of the oppressed" (172). It does this through placing Said and Khaled firmly in the realm of the Real and by depicting the capitalist underbelly of the cult of the martyr. Khaled and Said are depicted in all their mortal glory: they have families—imperfect ones at that—and jobs; they possess a certain amount of courage, but their courage and determination frequently falter; Said's family and friends, Khaled in particular, are not proud and stoic at his martyrdom; and Said is realistic about the meaning, or lack thereof in his act of martyrdom. They are depicted as real men, not divine heroes or symbols.

Additionally, Abu Assad draws attention to the seedy underbelly of the cult of martyrdom by including the shop owner who offers martyr videos for sell or rent and the behavior of Jamal, the recruiter. Through the show owner, Abu Assad reveals the sad truth that the death of a martyr

has become a commodity—though not as profitable a commodity as the death of a collaborator. Though Suha, the outsider of the film, is horrified by this macabre reality, Khaled and Said accept the practice as part of the norm. The martyr videos, which act as one form of recruitment for the resistance groups, form only one part of the system by which the cult of the martyr reproduces itself. Jamal, the character who recruits Said and Khaled for their suicide mission, is another integral part of the business of becoming a martyr. If martyr videos can be read as a commercial, Jamal is the real-life pitch-man. Finding new recruits and walking them through the process of suicide bombing is Jamal's job, and there are several scenes in the film where the viewer is able to see that Said and Khaled's recruitment and eventual martyrdom are just that for Jamal: a job. Jamal half-heartedly espouses rehearsed lines to reassure the young men and to help make sure they complete their mission. He does not seem to have any genuine affection for the two or any moral qualms with asking young men to die for his cause. Because of his nonchalant manner, he appears calloused and superficial. The callousness and opportunism of Jamal and the shop owner toward loss of life work to undermine the cult of the martyr in Palestinian society.

Both *Paradise Now* and *Omar* treat the contested identity of collaborators, though *Paradise Now* does so only peripherally. The practice of turning Palestinian citizens into informers against their own people and collaborators with Israeli officials is a particularly severe problem for Abu Assad. In his interview for *Cineaste*, he states "I feel that one of the biggest crimes of the Occupation is that it forces people to collaborate against their own interest. You can always find a weakness in a man that allows him to collaborate" ("This is a Film"17). However, the collaborator is also an identity that is rarely rounded out in Palestinian film and literature. Though it is often presented as an evil or a villain, like suicide bombers, the identity of collaborators is rarely explored in depth. While *Paradise Now* demonstrates the effects and

consequences of collaboration with the Israelis through the shop owner who sells the collaborator execution videos (which sell for more than martyr videos) and through Said's determination to follow through with his suicide mission in order to offset the damage his father caused as a collaborator, the film is not about the dangers and consequences of collaborating with the Israelis. Rather, the inclusion of the collaborator videos and the psychological damage created by collaborators offers a critique of the practice and its role in creating the emotions and psychological underpinnings that help produce suicide bombers. Gana explains,

Paradise Now proceeds in a way no less obviously accusatory of the occupation for generating and recruiting collaborators than subtly critical of the hypocritical socioeconomic norms whereby the tragic execution of a collaborator (*'ameel*) is denied the dignity of public grief, on the one hand, and, on the other, is recycled into a sought-after item in a lucrative video rental business. [...] Such a legacy of inarticulate grief, withdrawn from but hardly spared the shaming tirades of the public eye, is likely to set in motion, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective, an affective response of disparate incubational intensities--ranging from narcissistic and manic to melancholic rages--of suicidal proportions. (33)

In this way, the references to collaborators in *Paradise Now* function similarly to how collaborators are referenced in other Palestinian films: peripherally and as a problematic element of Palestinian society, but not as worthy of in-depth exploration.

Omar, however, is entirely about how one is recruited as a collaborator, the paranoia that runs rampant within the Palestinian population because of collaborators, and the ways that two men, Omar and Amajd, handle being recruited as collaborators differently. Abu Assad admits that in *Omar* he is working within archetypes of Palestinian society. He claims that "You have the adventurer, Tarek, who will start the war, Omar, the soldier, and Amjad, the opportunist who will earn from the war" (Abu Assad qtd in Garcia). However, the archetype of the soldier and the opportunist both fall victim to collaboration, and only the opportunist benefits from the encounter. Because a true and willing collaborator could not be the hero of a Palestinian film,

Abu Assad includes Omar as an unwilling collaborator who agrees to help the Israelis in order to avoid life in prison, but does not, in fact, give them any useful information. Because Omar is resistant to being recruited as a collaborator, he is a sympathetic character, one who appears trapped by and within an unfair system. Amjad is a more sinister character, though also portrayed as trapped within an unfair system. Amjad is a seemingly willing collaborator who uses the role to benefit himself at the expense of his life-long friends. While Omar resists the role of the collaborator and is therefore redeemable as a heroic, if also tragic, character, Amjad is the stereotypical collaborator, putting his own welfare and desires above his loyalty to friends, family, and nation. Amjad, though a more despicable character, is also portrayed as pinioned by the same social forces that attempt to pin Omar and, in many ways, is a foil for Omar. However, unlike many typical Western thrillers where the hero ultimately wins and the villains receive their punishments, the reverse happens in Palestine. Amjad, the deceptive and weak opportunist, marries Nadia and remains above suspicion as a collaborator while Omar, who does not collaborate with the Israelis in any meaningful way, loses his love to Amjad and, it is safe to assume, his life to either prison or immediate retaliation for shooting Rami. Though Omar does have the satisfaction of ending Rami's life, his own has been destroyed by the system of occupation in return.

Unlike *Paradise Now*, which generally eschews glamorizing or condemning Palestinian suicide bombing in general, *Omar* offers a scathing critique of the practice of recruiting collaborators. Neither the Israelis nor the "good" Palestinians benefit from the practice. Only the dishonest and amoral opportunist who is able to play both Palestinians and Israelis off one another benefits from such a practice. By examining this phenomenon in his film, Abu Assad is able to offer a more nuanced representation of how the process of recruiting collaborators works

in Palestine and a more nuanced view of the collaborators themselves. While he does not contradict the existence of Amjad-like collaborators and does not feign from depicting them in all their deception, Abu Assad also focuses on Omar as a character who highlights the problems with making assumptions about collaborators and how the paranoia created by the practice wreaks havoc on average Palestinians. This more sympathetic portrayal of a collaborator—because Omar does, in fact, appear to work with Rami to some degree—is precisely how Abu Assad narrativizes the contested identity of the collaborator in Palestinian society and does so in such a way that viewers must question their own assumptions about collaborators in Palestine and how the practice of recruiting collaborators wreaks havoc not only on the collaborator him or herself, as with Said's father in *Paradise Now*, but on the community in general.

In the process of narrativizing these contested identities, however, Abu Assad also emphasizes the agency of Palestinians within the Occupied Territories. Though all four characters, Rana, Said, Khaled, and Omar, are physically and socially constrained in some way—and Abu Assad does not shirk from representing the constraints—they also act to reclaim or reassert their identity and life in the face of those restraints. Unlike in Masharawi's films, where Palestinian characters frequently struggle, but often achieve only limited success in reclaiming agency over their lives or Elia Suleiman's films where ES is simply a passive observer, Abu Assad's characters are, by and large, successful in the throwing off the shackles of occupation and society, though for the male characters this typically results in death. Rana, despite the road blocks, curfews, and paternal demands, is able to marry the man of her choice. Said, despite his insistence that the occupation is responsible for his suicide bombing, actively makes the choice to follow through with his decision, despite attempts by Suha and Khaled to dissuade him. Khaled, likewise, actively chooses not to follow through with the mission, despite

the assurances of paradise from his “handler.” Both of these characters, though they ultimately choose differently, have a choice and actively work towards making that choice throughout the film. Omar is perhaps, at least on the surface, the most constrained of Abu Assad’s protagonists, but even Omar refuses to let the Israelis or his socially suspect position as a possible collaborator determine his existence more than it must. He does not give Rami accurate information about his friends and eventually breaks free of Rami at the end of the film by killing him. Though this action almost certainly results in his own death or life imprisonment, in that moment, Omar refuses to passively accept his role as a collaborator and takes action to end it. Though one can argue as to exactly how freely any of these actions and choices were made, these four characters are far more active than characters in most Palestinian feature films who are typically represented as passive subjects of occupation.

Hany Abu Assad’s cinematic accent can perhaps best be described as one that attempts to narrativize and bring to light contested identities through an innovative blending of traditional film genres. Though his style is fairly unremarkable and adheres closely to popular cinematic standards and expectations, his choices of characters and subject matter do not. By focusing on Rana, a Palestinian woman, Said and Khaled, two Palestinian suicide bombers, and Omar, an unwilling collaborator, Abu Assad is able to demonstrate the nuance and complexity involved in these often overlooked or vilified subjects. His emphasis is not on the nation-state, but on the individual psyches of these characters who employ all of their available resources to resist the occupation in whatever way they can.

Annemarie Jacir: The Dream of Return

Like Elia Suleiman and Hany Abu Assad, Annemarie Jacir belongs to a newer group of filmmakers who eschew Fatah's Palestinian nationalist dogma and place their emphasis on the individual experience of occupation over the collective village experience of occupation. She was born to Palestinian parents in Saudi Arabia in 1974. Her parents fled Palestine during the 1967 *Naksa* when their hometown was occupied by Israeli forces (Jacir "I Wanted" 241-2). She lived in Saudi Arabia until 1987, traveling to Palestine for three or four months each year to visit Bethlehem where her grandparents, aunts, and uncles still lived. She tells Barat, "I have known Palestine all my life and it's the one place that has always been constant. For me, it's home" ("Why Can't We"). These trips home, however, were not entirely happy occasions. Jacir recounts "These crossings of the bridge between Jordan and Palestine with my family year after year remain my most humiliating and painful childhood memories. Those experiences shaped forever the person I am today and definitely shape my work as an artist" ("Cinema" 45). These influences can be seen in both of her feature films, *Salt of this Sea* (2008) and *When I Saw You* (2012) through prominent themes of exile and return. Because of her strong relationship to Palestine and the length of time and amount of education she gained in the US, Palestine and the United States comprise Jacir's global-local-nexus. Though she operated fluidly between the two until she was exiled from Palestine, the bulk of her funding comes from European sources.

Her interest in poetry and writing initially sparked her interest in film. In high school she worked behind the scenes, writing and directing plays for the theater. She moved to the US in 1990 and eventually began editing and doing camera work for the film industry in LA (Jacir "I Wanted" 241). She majored in politics and literature at Claremont College ("Annemarie Jacir") and began working in Hollywood shortly thereafter. She recounts

After my undergraduate studies, I lived in Los Angeles where I worked on various film sets and with independent filmmakers, and then later in a literary agency, where I read ten screenplays a week. Eventually, I felt limited in what I could learn, and it was also clear to me that the kind of cinema I was working on was not the kind of cinema I wanted to make. ("I Wanted" 243)

After working in Hollywood for several years, she decided to attend Columbia for her MFA in film studies (Jacir "I Wanted" 241). She admits that, though she had experience with the professional side of filmmaking before entering graduate school, she "had no education in terms of film history and theory [going] to Columbia" ("I Wanted" 243). At first, her time at Columbia was hampered by her distaste for commercial cinema. Having always been drawn to more experimental cinema, having to learn the rules of commercial cinema before being allowed to experiment proved frustrating for Jacir, though she eventually realized that she had to first learn the rules before she could break them effectively (Jacir "I Wanted" 243). The benefits of living in New York were also myriad for Jacir. She claims that "to be able to see films on the big screen I had never seen before, to be in a city with a pass to all films at the New Your Film Festival, to be around so much international cinema--this was very important" ("I Wanted" 243).

She began making films, particularly short films, in 1994 and continued her work in various facets of filmmaking before embarking on her first feature film, *Salt of this Sea*. She was an integral part of the Dreams of a Nation film festival in New York City and has done extensive archival research on Palestinian films for the Dreams of a Nation project. However, shortly after completing the filming of *Salt of this Sea* in 2007, Jacir was refused entry to Palestine, which had a profound impact on the filmmaker. Before she was exiled, she claims she "always had the 'privilege' of Palestine" ("I Wanted" 253), but now, after being blocked, she feels that she understands something she "had never experienced before: looking into the distance and seeing a place you recognize as your own and know intimately, but which has become a forbidden one"

("Cinema" 45). She has lived in Amman, Jordan since 2007 (Jacir "I Wanted" 241) and struggled with depression after being banned from Palestine. However, while working on her second feature, *When I Saw You*, she explained "I live in Jordan because it's as close as I can get to Palestine right now. But I'm trying to do something positive with that limitation. My next film will be shot here, and it's about being so close to one's homeland, and, again, the arbitrariness of borders" ("I Wanted" 253).

While most Palestinian filmmakers are concerned with the injustices of the Palestinian people, Jacir's fictional films are perhaps even more focused on Palestinian issues of return than most. One of the most obvious ways that Jacir's worlds of filmmaking and activism collide was through her position as curator of the Dreams of a Nation film festival in New York in 2003. In her chapter in the book that resulted from the film festival, she claims

In organizing Dreams of a Nation, we wanted to highlight and discuss the impressive feat that Palestinian filmmakers were attempting--to develop an aesthetically and socially relevant body of filmmaking just when decades of cultural development in the West Bank, Gaza, and elsewhere, were being newly threatened, and we wanted to intervene and contribute to the present rather disappointing cultural discourse on Palestine in the US by introducing the nuanced and compelling work we were seeing from Palestinian filmmakers around the world. (Jacir "For Cultural" 25)

This attitude—the desire to make aesthetically and socially relevant films in order to combat the cultural destruction of “Palestinian-ness”—has affected her outlook on filmmaking in general.

Throughout several different interview, Jacir makes her approach to cinema clear: her approach to film is both personal and political. She claims that "Cinema defends life and seeks to express an experience and a truth" ("I Wanted" 244) and tells a different interviewer, "I make films about people, stories, and issues that simply mean something to me" ("I Wanted" 246). Because of the personal nature of her approach to film, it is no surprise that many of her films treat the topic of the right of return for Palestinians. Her parents fled Palestine in 1967 and Jacir was raised in

exile. She was allowed to return to Palestine with her family, but only temporarily. After filming *Salt of this Sea*, she was no longer allowed to return to Palestine at all. Issues of return have permeated her existence and these experiences coupled with her belief that film is about personal expression and truth have made the topic of return a prominent theme among her works.

However, Jacir approaches film as more than just a personal experience. Film, for Jacir, also represent political opportunity. She claims that "With cameras, we tell our own stories, represent our experiences, and resist being made invisible" ("For Cultural" 31). For Jacir, filming Palestinians in and of itself, is a political act because it makes Palestinians visible in a way that much of the world would rather not see. As previously mentioned, Palestinian "invisibility" is a long-standing trope against which Palestinians have been fighting for decades. However, her political approach to film goes beyond simply making Palestinians visible. She argues "we live in this world, and this is what's happening. I do think there is a real effort made to separate artists from politics. They say art should not be about politics, you should be above that. No, I do not agree with that at all. We are part of our societies. We live within them" ("Why Can't We"). Whereas many Palestinian filmmakers either avoid overt politics or treat them as a necessary evil to treating the subject matter of Palestine, Jacir embraces the relationship between the two.

Unlike the two previously discussed filmmakers in this chapter, Jacir has a background in literature and film history, with extensive work in archival research of Palestinian films, both of which influence her approach to film. She claims that her "work is as influenced by poetry and literature as it is influenced by film" ("I Wanted" 244). Her writing ability is evidenced both by her continued production of poetry as well as the by the accolades she has received for screenwriting, and this writing ability directly translates into her well-crafted scripting.

Additionally, her extensive work with recovering and archiving Palestinian films from the revolutionary era, has had a direct impact on her work as she includes references to her predecessors within her film. This tendency contributes to her individual cinematic accent and will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

Salt of this Sea is Jacir's first feature length fictional film and encountered many of the same types of financial woes that previous Palestinian filmmakers experienced. Like Abu Assad's *Paradise Now*, Jacir's *Salt of this Sea* treated a controversial topic: the right of return. Jacir recounts how this topic affected her ability to raise the requisite funds for the film:

Again and again, I was 'warned' by funders, producers, potential partners, etc. that this film was dealing with a red-line issue, and perhaps it would be better to make a first film on another subject and come back to this. Or that I needed a 'safety' partner, which should be Israeli. But I wanted to make a film about the *Nakba*. ("I Wanted" 249)

As is typical for Palestinian films, gathering the funds for *Salt of this Sea* was a lengthy and difficult process, though Jacir was eventually able to collect enough money to create the film from sources in Paris, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, and Palestine as well as a few private individuals. As usual, however, the funds did not come without a price. She claims that "due to various co-production rules, several requirements were placed on the production, including the location of post-production facilities ("Notes" 15). These funding difficulties were only the beginning of the troubles Jacir encountered while making the film.

Salt of this Sea was predominantly filmed in Ramallah, Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa. Jacir compiled her crew using as many local workers as possible; however, the lack of film schools in Palestine made finding laborers who were experienced with the film industry difficult (Jacir "Notes" 15). She did eventually complete her crew, but, in the end, it included "an ambulance driver, a lawyer, a radio DJ and a street sign painter" (Jaafar). She describes the film as a

learning experience that lead many of the Palestinian crew member to continue their work in the film field after completion of the project ("Notes" 15). Compiling her crew, however, was only half the struggle. While filming in Palestine was, according to Jacir, relatively easy ("I Wanted" 248), when she attempted to move the crew to Israel to film in Jaffa and Haifa, she was faced with a troubling choice because of the travel restrictions on her Palestinian crew members. Because most of her crew held Palestinian passports, her crew members could not travel in Israel and Palestine with the ease and fluidity that her American passport afforded her (Andrews 58). She was forced to hire an almost entirely new crew for filming in Israel because so many of her Palestinian crew were denied entry into Israel (Jacir "Notes"15). Jacir explains the troubles she encountered when trying to film in Israel:

I wanted to shoot in Israel without an Israeli producer or Israeli support. And I don't have Israeli citizenship. Everyone told me it was impossible. I don't know if it's true or not, but I've been told it's the first time a Palestinian production and crew, without any Israeli support or participation, has shot in Israel. Of course, the army blocked us: My crew was denied permissions, our locations were rejected, and I was also prevented from being in several locations. ("I Wanted" 248)

She describes the film as being shot in “guerilla-style” ("I Wanted" 248; "The Pursuit"). Though the Israeli government and army were less than hospitable, Jacir was able to circumvent the restrictions placed upon her in order to film *Salt of this Sea* entirely in Palestinian cities and villages, with the exception of the airport scenes and one other scene that they needed to reshoot after Jacir was denied entry to Palestine. Because they were denied permission to film at the airport, Jacir and her crew had to build a set to mimic the entire arrivals area of Ben Gurion Airport (Jacir "The Pursuit"). Despite these difficulties, Jacir was able to finish the film, which was then distributed internationally.

In terms of ethnoscapes and mediascapes, *Salt of this Sea* was primarily designed, according to Jacir, for a Palestinian audience (Jacir "I Wanted" 247), but was widely distributed

in the US and Europe. Though several US reviewers labeled it didactic (Kempt 91; Hale), shrill (Kemp 91) and far-fetched (Hale), the film was generally well received on the film festival circuit and garnered a number of awards. The lukewarm reception by US reviewers is not surprising given the topic and the general hostility of US media to the concept of the Palestinian right of return; however, it is also an indicator of the audiences Jacir was seeking and an example of the varied responses to the film itself. Jacir was not seeking to make a film that ‘humanizes’ Palestinians in particular or Arabs more generally. She explains that "To make work that will essentially 'humanize' or 'explain' Arabs is so limiting and, in fact, insulting, and I think it kills the potential of what I consider art. People who still don't get that Arabs are layered, complex 'humans' are simply not the audience I am interested in" ("I Wanted" 246).

Like most Palestinian films, despite the intentions or desires of the director, *Salt of this Sea* reached a diverse audience who had varying reactions. In the various screenings that Jacir mentions in her interviews, there were distinct reactions to her film that defied an East/West dichotomy. She claims that European and Arab audiences tend to understand Soraya's character very well. They understand her anger and tend to describe the film as poetic, soft, feminine. However, American audiences "find both the film and Soraya threatening, too aggressive, too direct, propaganda—anything but poetic. The politics of the film freaks them out" ("I Wanted" 248). She continues to point out, though, that Arab audiences pick up on nuances that both European and American audiences miss. She claims that "The Arab audience, of course, is very clued into the criticism of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestinian elite, the sham peace process, etc.—which a lot of other audiences tend to miss. They also get the use of tropes and symbols being turned on their heads or sometimes mocked in the film" ("I Wanted" 248). However, she also points out a distinction between how different types of Palestinian audiences

related to different characters. According to Jacir, Palestinians in the refugee camps tended to identify more with Soraya, while Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza tended to identify more with Emad. However, she also points out that the audience in other countries also identified with Soraya more so than others. Particularly, the audiences in Cyprus, India and Bosnia could relate to the character in ways that most foreign audiences could not or did not ("I Wanted" 249), given their own national histories of oppression and resistance.

Jacir's second feature, *When I Saw You*, does not perfectly fit the parameters of this study since it was technically filmed across the border, in Jordan. Towards the end of filming *Salt of this Sea*, Jacir was denied entry to Palestine and has been barred from the country ever since. As a result, she was unable to film any of *When I Saw You* in Palestine. Though I have tried to limit the films I am discussing to those filmed in Palestine, *When I Saw You* fits all of the other criteria I am using to limit the subject of this study and the location Jacir uses, since she can no longer use Palestine itself, is historically significant for Palestinians and as close as she can physically get to filming in the West Bank. Additionally, *When I Saw You* is appropriately placed for its content, which treats an important time period and situation in Palestinian history: the *Naksa*, the resulting refugee crisis, and the desire to and right of return. Given the location of filming on the exact site of a prior Fedayeen camp and in the very tunnels that the 1967 Fedayeen used (Jacir "Cinema" 48), one could say the film was made on sites that were historically inhabited by Palestinians, for however so brief a time. Jacir describes the tunnels she and her crew discovered, and later used in the film, in the Dibe'en forest that were the homes of some of the 1967 Fedayeen:

We found remnants of the time period everywhere; bullets, shell casings, and canned food. The tunnels you see in the film, where they hide and where they store supplies, are the actual tunnels the fighters made. We discovered the most intricate of tunnels, connecting to each other, a whole underground world. We

even found the tunnel where they built a hospital. Deep in the mountains, you enter a small hole to discover seven or eight large rooms, and inside all the remnants of the former hospital, including medicine, bottles, IB bags, and other supplies. ("Cinema" 48)

These historical realities, confronted in modern time, would certainly lend credence to the idea that though Jacir was unable to film in Palestine proper, she found and filmed in a genuinely Palestinian place. However, Jacir admits that the inability to film in Palestine did affect the decisions she made while writing and creating *When I Saw You* (Jacir "Honoring Palestinian").

The financing of *When I Saw You* is similar to Hany Abu-Assad's funding for *Omar*, representing a new and important trend among Palestinian filmmakers: the insistence of using primarily or exclusively Palestinian sources of funding for creating Palestinian films. Jacir was able to fund her second film with Arab sources and predominantly with Palestinian investors. However, unlike Abu-Assad, Jacir struggled for years to find the funding for *When I Saw You*. After three years of searching, she was able to cobble together a sufficient budget from Palestinian investors and additional support from Abu Dhabi's Sanad Fund, the Dubai Film Connection, and AFAC (Jacir "Pursuit"). However, this money came with its own costs. Jacir relayed how the granting agencies also have their own requirements that need to be met and coordinated in relation to the artistic demands of the film; these requirements were tied to the locations of the post-production work, rental of equipment, or hiring the funding country's citizens to work on the film (Oumlil 595). Even after three years of gathering funds, she was still only able to collect enough to make it through filming; she remained lacking sufficient funds to pay for post-production costs, much less distribution and film festival entry costs. Nevertheless, she could no longer postpone filming if she wanted to use Mahmoud Asfa for the lead role of Tarek; he was already eleven years old and would be too old to effectively play the ten year old character in another year (Jacir "Pursuit"). Though she was concerned that having an

unexpectedly low budget, approximately half of what she needed, would cause *When I Saw You* to look like a cheap, poorly made period piece (Jacir "Honoring Palestinian"), she decided to proceed. After filming, they were able to garner the remaining necessary funds from a Thessaloniki Film Festival award (Jacir "Pursuit").

Even with financing secured, filming, like with other Palestinian films, was no easy task. *When I Saw You* was filmed entirely in Jordan and primarily in two locations: Dibe'en forest, a forest where Fedayeen hid and trained for years after the *Naksa*, and the 'Harir Refugee camp,' a set entirely constructed by Jacir and her crew (Jacir "Cinema" 48). Jacir and her crew did much more scene construction for *When I Saw You* than for *Salt of this Sea*, most of which was filmed using the surrounding city and landscape as a set. The whole of the refugee camp was a constructed set, and they also built an entire training camp in Dibe'en. Because she wanted her actors to accurately recreate the lives and actions of the Fedayeen they were portraying, Jacir had the cast go through intensive military training before filming and they ran various training exercises in the Dibe'en location (Jacir "Cinema" 48). One day, during a particularly large training exercise, Jacir recounts that "Suddenly we heard helicopters overhead and within moments I think half the Jordanian army was above us wondering what in the world was going on. It must have looked like some 1970 flashback to them from up there" ("Cinema" 48).

Even before this episode, however, Jacir was surprised by the attitudes and resistance of the local Jordanian population to her film. She tells Dawson that "if you don't have money, the right last name, the right friends or if you have a critical tongue about certain political issues, including censorship and the government, unfortunately it's very difficult to find support [in Jordan]" ("Five Questions"). Such attitudes made finding filming partners in Jordan difficult. She explains:

I was surprised to discover that it's still a very sensitive topic in Jordan, even after so many years. [...] We felt it when looking for financing and for local sponsorship to make the film. We also faced occasional obstacle with the authorities during the production that caused setbacks, but we also found a lot of support. (Jacir "Cinema" 49)

Much of this support came from local villagers who were initially both nervous and intrigued by the film crew's goings on. She eventually began reaching out to and building relationships with the villagers, and they told her their stories (Jacir "Cinema" 48). Like several other directors, Jacir recruits as much local talent for her films as possible. She explains this decision, saying "it's also very important to work locally, and not bring in all your crew from abroad. It's part of what we need to do to build a self-reliant, independent cinema" ("Five Questions"). Her desire to work locally in order to help build a Palestinian film industry is by no means unique to Jacir, but it does influence her directorial style and filming techniques to some degree. For example, after she befriended the local villagers, she then hired a number of them to work on the film (Jacir "Cinema" 48). The choice to include as many local and regional cast members as possible also required the previously mentioned additional training in order to achieve the level of realism that Jacir desired. Perhaps the greatest challenge Jacir faced with *When I Saw You* was casting the role of Tarek. As with Khleifi in *A Tale of Three Jewels*, Jacir combed the countryside, searching for a young actor with the skill set she needed. After seeing over two hundred children for the role, Jacir and her crew traveled to the Irbid refugee camp and were introduced to Muhammad Asfa at the UNRWA school. Jacir claims that she "knew immediately he was Tarek" ("Pursuit").

When I Saw You was well received by the film festival circuit, winning several awards in a number of different festivals. It was also positively reviewed by a number of US media outlets including *The Village Voice* (Sherstuhl), *The Huffington Post*, *Variety*, and *Indiewire*

(“Acclaim”). It screened in a wide variety of cities and film festivals, including Ramallah, Jerusalem, Cairo, Abu Dhabi, Jordan and Lebanon (“Screenings”). *When I Saw You* was distributed in the UK, Hungary and Switzerland, and its reach was further extended by a stint on *Netflix*’s streaming service in the United States. It is also currently available for streaming through Amazon in the United States. In terms of authorial intent, Jacir claims that her “main audience is mostly Palestinian, but in no way limited to that circle, as it spreads over borders [...] That’s the beauty of filmmaking. Anyone who has been separated from a loved one or lived in exile can relate to *When I Saw You*” (“Cinema” 46). However, she does admit that the film, particularly the last scene as Tarek and Ghayyda run towards the border, resonates the most strongly with Palestinian refugees (“Cinema” 46).

Like with Masharawi’s films, making generalized statements about Annemarie Jacir’s film style is somewhat difficult. Though there are themes and artistic proclivities that can be found in both *Salt of This Sea* and *When I Saw You*, Jacir’s camerawork and framing in the two films is markedly different. The most likely reason for such a difference can be found in Jacir’s development as a filmmaker between the two films. She is the youngest director this dissertation treats and is currently in earlier stages of her career than the other directors, so her style is likely evolving more rapidly than the other filmmakers addressed in this dissertation. Though several other filmmakers began their careers at younger ages, they now have larger bodies of work, over longer periods of time than Jacir. As a result, their style has already matured and stabilized while hers is likely still developing and changing. It is also important to note that between filming *Salt of This Sea* and *When I Saw You*, Zhang Yimou selected Jacir to be his protégée through the Rolex Arts Initiative. Yimou is largely known for his striking use of color and scene compositions that resemble classical paintings. It is no surprise, then, that *When I Saw You*

appears to take more care with posing characters and composing scenes or that color, particularly red, green, white, and black—the colors of the Palestinian flag—are more prominent in *When I Saw You* than in *Salt of This Sea*. These differences are subtle, but represent a greater intentionality in Jacir’s film style from her first to her second film.

Though Jacir’s cinematography in *Salt of this Sea* includes carefully composed and occasionally beautiful shots, the frequency and elegance of these shots is increased in *When I Saw You*. In *When I Saw You*, almost every scene contains frames that, if taken as stills, would be examples of beautiful photography. The result of this shift toward and inclusion of more aesthetically pleasing images contributes to the “romantic” and “nostalgic” feel of *When I Saw*



Figure 12: Sorays and Emad conversing on top of the hill, *A Salt of This Sea*



Figure 13: Image of the wedding party, filmed from the outside of the building, *When I Saw You*



Figure 14: Image of Tarek, scared and alone after running away from the refugee camp, *When I Saw You*

You as well. Similarly, her use of color is more pronounced in *When I Saw You*, though color is by no means absent from *Salt of This Sea*.

Her use of color in *When I Saw You* is, like her framing, more intentional. For the bulk of the film, Tarek is in a red shirt with a white stripe, moving among the green-clad Fedayeen. When the red and green are coupled with the black hair of the majority of the cast and the white sky in many scenes, all of the colors of the Palestinian flag are present. Indeed, any time that Tarek walks with a Fedayee, the two appear as the human embodiment of the Palestinian flag. The appearance of these colors throughout the film, but especially once Tarek reaches the Fedayeen camp, are not an accident, nor is the use of color, or lack thereof, in the refugee camp when compared to the Fedayeen camp. In the refugee camp, the dominant colors are gray, sandy brown, and white, creating a cold tone in the film. The refugee camp is characterized mostly by



Figure 15: Tarek and Ahmed walking to the Fedayeen camp, in the colors of the Palestinian flag.



Figure 16: Even in the sunlight, the images from the refugee camp are predominantly dull shades of white, gray and blue.

a lack of color which further highlights the stunted version of life the refugees are forced to live in the limbo of the refugee camp. Alternatively, when Tarek sets off for Palestine, the viewer slowly sees color and greenery re-enter the scene, and the tone of the film begins to warm, though Tarek must first wander through what appears to be a rather barren area and spend a dark night alone before Ahmed discovers him and brings him to the verdant Fedayeen camp. The Fedayeen camp is situated in a wood, in the hills; as a result, Jacir includes lush green trees and an occasional sweeping landscape of the hills. Though the sandy brown tones are still present in the earth and rocks around the Fedayeen camp, they are joined by multiple shades of green, darker browns, and reds. These darker shades help create contrast in the footage and bring out the warmer tones of the earth and rocks. As a result, the Fedayeen camp is visually warm and inviting whereas the refugee camp is cold and distant. This intentional use of color to create tone

and symbols within the film is likely the result of an evolution in Jacir's style after her apprenticeship with Yimou.

The different artistic approach to the films is even more pronounced when one considers that they follow the same basic plot structure: a Palestinian refugee gets back in touch with her Palestinian roots and rejects the borders that have been placed upon her while simultaneously confirming her Palestinian identity. The two films are simply operating in opposite directions. Soraya comes from outside of Palestine, enters it in order to reconnect with her Palestinian identity, and is then forced to leave again, though she rejects the borders and global system that work to keep her from her ancestral homeland (Yacub 234). Ghayyda was kicked out of Palestine and, while outside, reconnects with her Palestinian identity through the Fedayeen and Tarek, who never forgets his. She then decides to reject the border and transgress it in order to go back to Palestine, though the viewer does not know if she and Tarek are ultimately successful. The characteristics that mark Jacir's films as distinct from those of other prominent Palestinian directors include her centering of female characters as active agents who successfully, for the most part, resist the male gaze and her use of and references to archival Palestinian film footage. There is also a certain amount of fantasy in the main characters of both films that adds a hint of whimsy to her filmic accent and work to destabilize traditional notions of Palestinian nationalism.

Though other Palestinian filmmakers have included women in important roles in their films, Jacir not only includes women as protagonists, but also refuses to sexualize those women. Rather, she uses them to challenge traditional gender roles in the region. Though both Soraya and Ghayyda are female, neither is framed by the traditional heterosexual male gaze. Oumlil explains that, for Soraya and, I would add for Ghayyda also, "The camera work is carried out in

such a way that it does not impose a male gaze on the spectators” (“Re-writing” 592). Yacub (228) concurs and Jacir herself confirms her intentions with Soraya in an interview with Oumlil:

Soraya is not a Hollywood character. She’s not sexualized; she’s not simple. She’s not even sympathetic all the time. [...] And the way she’s filmed. I don’t believe in women’s cinema and men’s cinema, but I do believe that Hollywood trains people to film and portray women in a certain way and to portray men in another way. That’s definitely something that I am against and I don’t want to be doing. (“Re-Writing” 592).

Though there is a brief scene in *When I Saw You* in which Ghayyda flirts with Ahmed, Ghayyda is not generally portrayed as a sexual object. Indeed, her closed off and cold attitude in the refugee camp is precisely the opposite of the traditional warm and inviting image of women in cinema. It is only when Ghayyda enters the Fedayeen camp that she is able to lower her guard. The gender roles in the Fedayeen camp are much more relaxed than those in the Refugee camp, and it is only through these relaxed gender roles that Ghayyda is able to rediscover herself (Jacir "Interview with"). Furthermore, these two female protagonists are active agents in the films. Soraya is an especially strong agent. Oumlil points out that Jacir uses Soraya to counter dominant representations of passive Arab and Muslim women in that Soraya is not only capable of saving herself, but she also repeatedly saves Emad (“Re-Writing” 591). Similarly, Ghayyda does not look to the predominantly male Fedayeen to save her or Tarek. In fact, rather than heeding their warnings and following their instructions at the end of the film, she chooses to take action to reclaim her home when she takes Tarek’s hand and runs with him toward the border.

In addition to treating prominent female characters as non-sexualized, active agents, Jacir is the only Palestinian filmmaker who has consistently used archival Palestinian footage both as a reference and as a device within the films themselves. This is perhaps not surprising given her extensive work with the Palestinian film archive through the Dreams of a Nation project in the early 2000s. Jacir uses her knowledge of archival Palestinian films as well as clips

from the films themselves in different ways and to different ends in her two films, but the presence of and allusions, whether direct or indirect, to the history of Palestinian filmmaking produce a distinct effect on her films. Oumlil describes Jacir's use of archival footage as part of a feminist archaeology, which Oumlil describes as a method of reclaiming the history of women and other disenfranchised bodies through a rediscovery, called "digging," and sharing of their lost stories ("Re-Writing" 588-9). It can be argued that Jacir does this both through her characters, as Oumlil points out, but also through her use of archival footage to influence her set construction, musical choices, and film style in *When I Saw You* and her use of actual footage from the archives within *Salt of This Sea*. Jacir opens *Salt of This Sea* with footage of Palestinians fleeing the port of Jaffa in 1948. Much of this footage has never been seen by large audiences, and Jacir uses it to open her film and set the stage for Soraya's story, which involves picking up some of the pieces that her grandfather left behind when he fled Jaffa in 1948. The archival footage acts as a bridge between the past history and the present fiction of Soraya's story. Oumlil explains that Soraya's goal when they visit her grandfather's house in Jaffa is to bring to light her own lost story ("Re-Writing" 589). Though Oumlil primarily focuses on the exchange between Soraya and Irit, the Jewish woman who is now living in Soraya's family home, in which Soraya demands that Irit recognize Soraya's claim on the property ("Re-Writing" 590), Soraya and Emad's entire journey in to Israel could be described as an attempt to "dig" up their lost family stories. After all, following the tense conversation with Irit, Soraya and Emad seek out and visit Emad's family's village, discussing his family's history with Dawayima and demonstrating the re-narrativization of its ruins' history through an encounter with a class of Israeli school children and their teacher.

Similarly, the whole of *When I Saw You* could be considered an attempt to bring to light lost stories. Though she does not chose to incorporate actual archival film footage in *When I Saw You*, the influence of her work with the Palestinian film archives is no less felt.; however, the methods Jacir uses to bring to light the stories of the Fedayeen and the 1967 refugees revolve around music choices, set construction, and style of filming as much, if not more than, the use of characters. Jacir conducted extensive research on the music the Fedayeen would have listened to at their camps. She used this information to develop the song that the Fedayeen sing around the campfire and incorporated as much of the other music she discovered as possible through the radio in the background. She explains:

In the late 1960s Palestinians were very much connected to what was happening all over the world--they were listening to Arabic classics and also creating a new kind of music, influenced from both the east and the west, and pushing boundaries, as in their own lives. I worked with long-time collaborator Kamran Rastegar on the original track and also researched and discovered a lot of obscure musicians and bands of the time; Lebanese rock, Armenia fusion, Egyptian jazz, Moroccan avant-garde Gnawa, some really fun stuff, and that is what we hear on the radio most of the time in the film, other than the constant news broadcasts" ("Cinema" 47).

By “digging” up the music the Fedayeen actually listened to in the late 1960s, Jacir is able to more accurately convey life at the Fedayeen camp. She recovers the sound of the Fedayeen’s story, not just the story itself.

In addition to using her knowledge of the archives and historical research to influence her music choices, she also relied heavily on those same resources in order to construct the set of the refugee camp. In one interview, Jacir notes that "documentaries, archival photos and films were critical to recreate the refugee camp's appearance, the look of the people and of the fedayeen" ("Cinema" 47). Because she and her crew constructed the entire set of the refugee camp themselves rather than relying on a portion of an existing camp in a different location, she chose

to draw on her knowledge of Palestinian film and history archives in order to be as realistic as possible. As a result, the refugee camp was so realistic that one extra from the nearby village, an older woman who had left Palestine with her family in 1967 and had lived in a refugee camp in Jordan, briefly forgot that she was not, in fact, back in a 1960s refugee camp while filming (Jacir “Honoring”).

Another method Jacir used to incorporate archival footage into her films is by referencing them, either through her film style or by directing including footage from the archives, in both of her films. Both types of references, however, contribute to a certain level of fantasy in the films. She chooses not to use footage from the Palestinian film archives in *When I Saw You*; however, she also claims that

The film is wrought with references to their [previous Palestinian filmmakers'] works. In fact, it is a homage to them. Again and again in the film, I tried to make a direct nod to those filmmakers and the way they filmed themselves and saw themselves, full of light and life. It's also one of the reasons for the freeze frame at the end, among other shots. ("Cinema" 48)

This is a much more subtle method of paying homage to previous filmmakers than simply including clips of their films, one that might be missed by someone unfamiliar with the archival footage themselves. As a result of using this approach, her depiction of the Fedayeen has received some criticism for being overly romanticized, nostalgic, and gentle (Kemp 91). Choosing to represent the Fedayeen as they saw themselves very well may have contributed to these claims, though Jacir herself reject them ("Cinema" 45-6). In *Salt of This Sea*, she takes a different approach and chooses to include the actual footage from the archives. She claims "As for the *Nakba* archives, I have never seen those images in a feature film before, and they were crucial for me to 'set the stage' ("I Wanted" 251). However, they do much more than simply set the stage for the film. Jacir admits that “Yes, this is a fictional films, but this story comes from

somewhere. [...] All our lives, our history has been erased and denied. So I had to start the film with that" ("I Wanted" 251). She actively uses both the film styles of the archives and the footage itself to reclaim the lost narratives, vision, and sound of early Palestinian filmmakers. Hedges points out, with regards to the archival footage in *Salt of This Sea*, that "this melding of fictional narrative and documentary creates a surrealist atmosphere in which the protagonist must navigate, through a landscape of memory that is rife with trauma" (Hedges 80). This surrealist atmosphere contributes to the underlying fantasy and whimsical elements of both films as well.

Like Elia Suleiman's work, Annemarie Jacir's filmic accent employs a fantastical element. However, both the means and the ends of Jacir's fantasy elements are very different from Suleiman's. While Suleiman employs surrealism and absurdism throughout his feature films to produce an often harsh and biting criticism of both Palestinian society and Israeli occupation, Jacir's fantastical elements are more subtle and, in many ways, child-like in their innocence and simplicity. The end result is a less-biting use of fantasy to highlight the rejection of traditional national modes and borders as well as to counter Israeli hegemony in the region. However, the ways through which she integrates elements of fantasy into the two films are very different. In *Salt of This Sea*, Soraya's fantasies of Palestine are carried out through her physical and visceral interactions with the landscape, rather than her interactions with Palestinians and Israelis. Because *When I Saw You* is at least partially from the perspective of Tarek, a ten year old child, its fantasies are incorporated through his behaviors and attitudes.

In *Salt of This Sea*, Soraya returns to Palestine hoping, perhaps expecting, to be able to reclaim her grandfather's money that was lost in 1948 and establish residence in Palestine. Though, on the surface, this may not seem like an extraordinary goal, her expectations are based on her fantasy of what Palestine represents or should be rather than the reality of the area. In the

beginning of the film, Emad is her counterpoint, regularly reminding her that she speaks in grand terms and ideals when the reality of life in the West Bank is very different than the Palestine she has constructed in her mind. Emad, however, eventually joins Soraya in her fantasy when they decide to rob the bank. Soraya is a visceral character who is constantly feeling, both physically and emotionally, the environment around her. Her most meaningful interactions are not with people along the route of her journey but with landscapes (Yacub228-9). The landscapes are easier to fit into her fantasy whereas her interactions with people contradict the fantasy of Palestinian homeland that she and Emad are attempting to live out during their caper (Yacub 231). According to Yacub, Soraya and Emad “are not interested in discovering what this place [Israel] has become, which means that their interactions with Israelis almost always register as little shocks that jolt them from their fantasy of returning to the homeland” (231). However, Yacub also points out that Emad and Soraya are never allowed to inhabit their fantasy Palestinian homeland for very long. She explains that

the real places—the houses of West Jerusalem and Jaffa, Dawayima, and even the beach—have been appropriated for other people and purposes. Soraya, Emad and Marwan can only visit them. They can see them, and as a result of their transgression, experience them for a time with their other senses, but they are never allowed to inhabit them. (231)

As a result, the fantasy that Jacir presents in *Salt of This Sea* is always interrupted and never fulfilled. The fantasy elements, though different, are similarly unfulfilled in *When I Saw You*.

Tarek is the impetus for fantasies in *When I Saw You* while his mother, Ghayyda plays a grounding role similar to Emad’s in the first portion of the film. Like Soraya, Tarek refuses to be dissuaded that he cannot simply walk back home to Palestine. He either does not understand or refuses to accept the idea that he cannot go home because of the Israeli invasion. Though Ghayyda tries to explain, repeatedly, that they must wait at the camp for his father, Tarek refuses

to accept this injunction. Like Emad, however, Ghayyda eventually indulges in Tarek's fantasy, despite the danger it represents. Tarek's departure forces her to leave the refugee camp in order to find him, and when she finds him in the Fedayeen camp, she begins to rediscover herself and see the value in Tarek's fantasies of home. As a result, at the end of the film, rather than grabbing Tarek's hand and dragging him back to the camp and out of harm's way, she takes his hand and runs with him toward the border, toward danger, but also toward home. However, the film ends before Tarek and Ghayyda reach the fence, so, like Soraya's fantasies, Tarek's fantasy is interrupted and the viewer never seen whether or not it comes to fruition. In fact, the viewer knows that, even if Tarek and Ghayyda make it safely across the border and back to their village, their lives and their home will never return to normal.

Though the protagonists' fantasies are not fulfilled in either film, that is not to say that the fantasies do not serve a purpose or achieve a goal. In fact, the fantasy elements in both films work as a means of denying Israel and Israeli hegemony a place in the films and on the screen and lead to the same basic conclusion of rejecting traditional concepts of national belonging and borders. Unlike earlier directors who often heavily focused on the difficulties and injustices of the Israeli occupation, neither of Jacir's film emphasizes Israeli presence and occupation. Israelis and the Occupation are both present in the background of the films, which is somewhat inevitable in any film about Palestine; however, both Soraya and Tarek reject Israeli presence and occupation as illegitimate and irrelevant to their purposes. This, of course is part of their fantasies, but it also works to undermine the legitimacy of Israeli hegemony and minimize the screen time of the occupation. In *Salt of This Sea*, Soraya works in direct opposition to the presence of Israelis once she, Emad and Marwan cross into Israel proper. Though Israeli citizens are present throughout this portion of the film, Soraya rejects them either implicitly, as in the

scene of the trio on the beach, or explicitly, as in her encounter with Irit. She is also quick to reject Israeli sovereignty by rejecting the various rules and regulations that hinder her fantasy once she is within Israel's borders. She subverts the regulations governing the border and the laws that would prevent her from remaining in Israel by repeatedly and smoothly lying to various authority figures, and she openly rejects Irit's and the Israeli government's claim to her family home in Jaffa. Similarly, in *When I Saw You*, Tarek rejects Israel's claim on his home. However, while an Israeli presence is impossible to ignore entirely in *Salt of This Sea* because of the characters' entry into Israel proper, Jacir is able to almost entirely eliminate any physical presence of Israeli soldiers in *When I Saw You*. Throughout the film, the only image of Israel's military power is a jeep patrolling the distant border. Otherwise, the entire focus of the film is on Palestinian experience. The Fedayeen are not defined by their antagonism to the Israelis; they are framed by their longing for home and their relationships with each other. Like Soraya, Tarek rejects Israeli claims on the land. Tarek does not frame his desire to go home as a desire to retake or reclaim his home from Israeli invaders. His desire is simply to go home, to a place that, in his mind, his family never stopped possessing and that still belongs to him. Though this desire is presented as the fantasy of a child, it is no less a condemnation and rejection of Israel's hegemonic erasure of Palestinian presence and historical sovereignty in the area.

An important facet of both Soraya's and Tarek's fantasies is the end result of denying conventional national modes. Wadi explains that *Salt of this Sea*, and, I would add, *When I Saw You* both "refuse borders because they oblige them to define a home; they refuse them precisely because they reside at these borders" (Wadi 192). Home and homeland are frequent topics of discussion in Palestinian narratives, and Jankovic explains that "Jacir's films posit versions of Palestinian belonging that are constituted through an unstable and/or unreachable home [...],

embracing a defiant claim to sovereignty and community that persists with or without any claim on normative national structure, a definite place, or citizenship” (30). The result of the fantasy in *Salt of This Sea* and *When I Saw You* is an acceptance of Palestinian identity regardless of the untenability of physical home or nation in the Occupied Territories and both protagonists’ subsequent rejection of national borders. Soraya finds her identity as a Palestinian and rejects “a global system of states and borders that separates people from each other and from places, and [distinguishes] her identity as a Palestinian from that system” (Yacub 234) while Ghayyda and Tarek choose to physically reject the newly constructed Palestine/Jordan border and reclaim what is left of their home.

Jacir’s filmic accent is heavily impacted by her experience as a Palestinian who grew up in exile, which explains her tendency toward a thematic focus on the right of return. Her artistic accent is marked by careful framing and use of color, while the motifs that contribute to her accent include the use of strong female characters with active agency and the use of fantasy elements to deny Israeli hegemony and traditional ideologies of Palestinian nationalism.

Conclusions

Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad and Annemarie Jacir are three of the most prominent names in Palestinian fictional film to date. They each represent unique, but significant strides in Palestinian filmmaking and all three are still actively making films. Through his self-education in Israel as well as the United States, Suleiman has developed a distinctive film style and accent that incorporates the frequent use of wide angle lens, a disjointed, non-narrative structure, and a strategic use of silence. He uses dark comedy, toys with traditional symbols, and employs observant silences throughout his films to subvert traditional national discourses and open spaces

for the reinterpretation of those discourses. However, he is also careful not to propose a solution to the problems he examines in his films. Abu Assad, similarly self-educated in the Netherlands and Hollywood, developed an entirely different accent than Suleiman's. Abu Assad's stylistic accent relies on a more traditional Hollywood film style and the incorporation and twisting of traditional genres such as the thriller and the romance. He focuses on unknown or relatively unexplored subjectivities in his films, and though his films do not explicitly emphasize anti-nationalistic approaches like Suleiman's or Jacir's, the content of his films raises difficult questions about both Fatah's and Hama's brands of nationalism and the current approach to resistance in the West Bank and Gaza. Despite the seemingly tragic endings of both *Omar* and *Paradise Now*, Abu Assad also returns agency to his protagonists. Though both Said and Omar likely end up dead at the end of the films, their deaths are their conscious choices. Neither they nor Rana act as passive victims of the occupation; rather, they actively resist the constraints of occupation through the avenues that are available to them. Jacir's accent shares some similarities with Abu Assad's, though they are ultimately clearly distinct from one another. Jacir is the only director in this chapter who received a formal film education and whose work is rooted in Palestinian film history. Her stylistic accent, which is likely still developing, employs classic framing techniques and the careful, intentional use of color to convey tone throughout her films. She focuses on female characters but is careful not to subject them to the traditional heterosexual male gaze of the camera. Her female characters are not sexualized and function, like Abu Assad's characters, as active agents in the films. They do not succumb to stereotypes of the passive Arab woman, accepting the vicissitudes of occupation or exile with patient endurance. Both Soraya and Ghayyda choose to resist the paths of exile that the Israeli occupation would force them into and direct their own lives as much as possible. Both of Jacir's films also employ

fantasy as a means of undermining traditional Palestinian nationalist ideologies and reject national borders or geographically restricted identities. Through these three directors, particularly Abu Assad and Jacir, we can begin to see the infancy of what may one day develop into a Palestinian film industry. Both Abu Assad and Jacir built upon previous directors' attempts at training and using local, Palestinian talent in all of their films, but particularly in their most recent two. The ability to accrue entirely Palestinian funding and predominantly Palestinian cast and crew represent a significant advancement in the fledgling Palestinian fictional cinema.

Though all three directors have different accents and different styles, they all participate in an important trend of more recent Palestinian fictional filmmakers. Junka-Aikio claims that what is missing from current Palestinian political discourse is the representation of "struggles that cannot be articulated, political subjects that have no discourse and therefore cannot be represented or understood as a political force" (405). She goes on to describe Suleiman's trilogy as an example of a film whose characters represent "a multitude of hybridised, late modern subjects of colonial occupation whose lives are profoundly entangled in politics and resistance without articulating a hegemonic struggle" (405). I would add Abu Assad's and Jacir's films to the same category. All three filmmakers include characters who are hybridized colonial subjects, who are constantly entangled in resistance but do not ever articulate a coherent, hegemonic struggle or means of resistance. In these films, the path to resistance becomes personal and individualized. There is no path that fits all characters or all Palestinians. Though they all seem to indicate that some level of resistance is necessary and possible, that the situation in Palestine is untenable, there is no quick and easy call to a particular type or style of Palestinian unity and resistance. As a result, readings that situate these films as advocates of a particular brand of nationalism or resistance would be tenuous at best. Though this refusal to articulate may very

well be a phase in Palestinian fictional film production, it is a phase that is not served well by reading the films strictly in terms of the Palestinian national movements or in relation to the uprisings that surround their production. These films and their directors do not seek to answer questions, but to raise them.

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Chapter Four: Ideoscapes

Although directors like Suleiman, Abu Assad and Jacir are often able to circumvent traditional concepts of nationalism in individual films, the genre of Palestinian fictional cinema and its accent are inextricably tied to notions of the national struggle for self-determination and freedom from occupation. The strictures of occupation necessarily invade any remotely realistic film about Palestinians living in the West Bank or Gaza because of the occupation's pervasive nature. It is inescapable and unavoidable. It is also existentially tied to concepts of formal Palestinian nationhood, as the occupation is the primary reason for Palestine's continued formal statelessness. Because of the relationship between life in Palestine and the occupation and the occupation and the Palestinian nation, a film that treats one of these topics is forced to address all of them in varying degrees of directness. However, treating the topic of Palestinian nationhood is not necessarily synonymous with employing Fatah's or Hama's nationalist discourse to advocate for a Palestinian state. While the status of Palestine's autonomy, or lack thereof, is always present or implied in Palestinian fictional film, discourses of Fatah's Palestinian nationalism are not. The shift from unified nationalist discourse to multiperspectival approaches to the Palestinian national character can be seen through a careful examination of the five most prominent ideoscapes that occur across the genre: blocked space and time, weddings and cultural celebrations, exile and return, images of violent resistance, and psychological trauma. These ideoscapes work to formulate a conception of Palestinian identity that is not based on the unified monoculture of Fatah's secular nationalism or Hama's Islamic nationalism, but rather on nuanced, complex experiences from a variety of Palestinian perspectives.

Arjun Appadurai defines ideoscapes as the political conglomerations of images, usually upholding national or state ideology, especially Enlightenment principles (33). Within the

context of Palestinian films, I have been using “ideoscapes” to describe how the films use conglomerations of images, themes or motifs, to convey various ideologies. While individual directors favor specific thematic and ideological approaches, all fictional Palestinian films include certain themes, tropes, and motifs that reinforce ideological conceptions of Palestinian identity and resistance. These ideologies fluctuate with time and historical circumstance, so approaching this section by theme and how approaches to that theme have changed over time will be more productive than approaching it through the individual directors.

Naficy delineates a number of common themes, tropes and motifs across accented cinema, including journeys (33), autobiography (33), borders (31), the emphasis on tactile sensibilities (28), and physical as well as mental bodily dislocation (28). He adds that accented cinema tends to employ specific structures of feeling because it is intensely place-bound and often emphasizes nationalism and state formation. These prominent structures of feeling include loss, sadness, loneliness, alienation, and the desire to recapture or return to the lost homeland (27). While Palestinian fictional film participates in all of these themes and tropes to some degree, definitively marking it as “accented cinema,” the unique position of Palestinians in the world as a result of the geographical scattering of the Palestinian population produces important differences from much accented cinema in the degree and intensity of the representation of several of these themes and tropes.

According to Naficy, Palestinian cinema is structurally as well as thematically exilic (“Palestinian Exilic” 91). Palestinian cinema, lacking a home film industry and being produced within and between a variety of different host countries, is the cinematic structural equivalent of an exile. However, in addition to this structural exile, Palestinian exilic cinema is, as of now, the *only* Palestine cinema. Though I have discussed the ways in which this structural exile affects

Palestinian cinema's financing, production, distribution and reception, it also has profound impacts on the themes and tropes that filmmakers choose to include within their works. Borders and journeys take on more significance as the result of this exilic structure. In addition to its exilic structure, Alexander argues that Palestinians occupy an unusual geographical space in the modern world: they are one of the only colonized people in an era of post-colonialism.

According to Alexander, this unique situatedness of Palestinians results in a more intense connection to the homeland (153-4), which is evident in Palestinian films. However, Palestinian cinema's position as both exiled and colonized would, at first glance, seem to encourage an emphasis on nationalism, and, indeed, the documentaries of early Palestinian film, were utilized to help construct and reify the various brands of Arab or Palestinian nationalism for their corresponding political group (Gertz and Khliefi *Palesinian*). However, contemporary Palestinian fictional filmmakers have a more tenuous relationship to Palestinian nationalism and have generally moved towards more individualized approaches to representing the experience of occupation in recent years.

Though scholars disagree on the degree to which fictional Palestinian films seek to establish, reify or counter Palestinian nationalism or Palestinian national identity, the primary ideoscape at work in Palestinian film is the establishment and reification of Palestinian cultural identity. Telmissany explains that "Palestinian cinema constitutes a site for negotiation and circulation of values and behaviors that contribute to the assertion of Palestinian cultural and national identities" (70). The extent to which this cultural identity overlaps with or functions as a part of national identity remains up for debate; however, many Palestinian film scholars agree that fictional Palestinian film has shifted away from the instrumentalism that, according to Massad, defined documentary films of the 70s (39), which was categorically focused on building

and reinforcing various brands of Palestinian nationalism, and toward more nuanced articulations of Palestinian identity. Naficy argues that the type of border consciousness that most Palestinian filmmakers occupy is, “like exilic liminality, theoretically against binarism and duality and for a third optique, which is multiperspectival and tolerant of ambiguity, ambivalence, and chaos” (Naficy 31). This multiperspectival approach complicates discourses of nationalism and offers, instead, more complex and nuanced approaches to Palestinian identity. Gertz argues that directors like Elia Suleiman and Hany Abu Assad work from their situatedness in discourses of masculinity and nationalism, but, as products of postmodernism, their films also question these positions in favor of presenting “an ambivalent, multilingual, and multicultural world (“Space” 159). According to Nashef, Palestinian filmmakers accomplish this goal by creating “a visual narrative that attempts to represent ordinary people trying to survive in testing situations, resisting mythologization” (83), which is in stark contrast to the homogeneous portrayals of Palestinian society in earlier documentary films. Nashef argues that these ordinary Palestinian characters demonstrate agency through their attempts to simply exist under occupation (Nashef 83). It is precisely these attempts at simple existence that the films use to demonstrate, question, and offer alternatives to the various ideologies that shape Palestinian cultural identity. The films addressed in this dissertation employ the tropes and motifs of blocked spaces and time, cultural celebrations (particularly weddings), journeys of exile and return, resistance and visual violence, and psychological trauma to problematize traditional notions of Palestinian identity and open spaces for reconceptualizing that identity.

Blocked Space and Time

The tropes of borders and blocked spaces in Palestinian fictional film are ubiquitous. While the border trope overlaps significantly with that of exile and return, it is a distinctive trope that often functions independently of exile and return. The majority of scholarly works on fictional Palestinian films focus on space in binaries opposites: public/private (Gertz and Khleifi "Palestinian" 322; Layoun 101; Yaqub "The Palestinian" 65), social/political (Dickinson 142), interior/exterior (Hedges 70; Kennedy 44), masculine/feminine (Layoun 101; Kennedy 44). Much of it also includes discussions of how Palestinian cinema complicates these binaries by refracting and reorganizing space (Dickinson 142; Hedges 70) or by emphasizing the leakages and connections between them (Yaqub "The Palestinian" 65). While space in Palestinian film can be read as binary opposites in many productive ways and these readings can and do produce quality analyses, the concept of chronotopes, which will allow a treatment of space and time together, will be more useful for my analysis of how space and time function within and across Palestinian films to shape concepts of Palestinian identity, reify certain ideologies, and differentiate Palestinian films from other accented cinema in important ways.

A number of scholars of Palestinian fictional film, including Gertz and Khleifi, Hedges and Mendes, treat issues of borders, space, and time together since space, and its blockages, are directly related to audience experiences of time within specific genres. Bakhtin explains that, while it is difficult if not impossible to track the relationships between actual historical space and time within novels, "Isolated aspects of time and space, however, --those available in a given historical stage of human development—have been assimilated, and corresponding generic techniques have been devised for reflecting and artistically processing such appropriated aspects of reality" (Bakhtin 84). The term he uses to describe this phenomenon is the *chronotope*, which

he defines as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin 84). He goes on to explain that

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (Bakhtin 84)

While Bakhtin is focused on chronotopes in literature, the concept of the chronotope has been employed to examine the functions of time and space in films as well.

Naficy, specifically, builds upon Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope in his discussion of how space and time operate in accented cinema. He explains that, in cinema, chronotopes indicate the temporal and spatial settings of the stories being told. He argues “accented films encode, embody and imagine the home, exile, and transitional sites in certain privileged chronotopes that link the inherited space-time of the homeland to the constructed space-time of the exile and diaspora” (152). Naficy delineates three types of chronotopic space within accented cinema, around which accented films are organized: open, closed, and transitional. Open chronotopes typically include images of nature, landscapes, ancient monuments, or similar features, which are often used to create a “utopian prelapsarian chronotope of the homeland”(152). Closed chronotopes invoke tight living spaces, prisons, and blocked spaces which tend to invoke imprisonment and panic (153). Transitional chronotopes include liminal, third spaces like borders, cars, buses, and airports (153) and have more flexible meaning that must be surmised based on the context of the film. While open chronotopes are occasionally present in Palestinian fictional film, closed and transitional chronotopes are particularly prominent because they are a better reflection of the Palestinian identity under occupation. As Bresheeth points out, Israel and Palestine “are now mortally locked in a struggle around boundaries, in which the subtext is a struggle about identity. Boundary struggles are always

struggles about the *self*, and its separation from the *other*" (Bresheeth "A Symphony" 72). To that end, the ubiquitous use of closed and transitional chronotopes throughout the films functions to present a Palestinian identity that is both rooted in resisting but also severely limited by the blockages and closings of space and time that result from the apparatus of occupation.

The chronotopes of blocked space and time within Palestinian films have been most clearly demarcated by Gertz and Khleifi as well as Hedges. According to these authors, time and daily life are drawn to a halt by the blockages of space both at the borders and within the home. Since borders and journeys will be the topic of the section on transitional chronotopes that follows, I will here focus on restricted and blocked space within the sphere of home and community. As Gertz and Khleifi note, Palestinian cinema has been both a witness to and documentarian of shrinking Palestinian spaces in the West Bank and Gaza since the Oslo Accords ("Palestinian" 321). This geographical shrinking of space has been accompanied by an increase in claustrophobic, closed chronotopes in Palestinian films. Hedges argues that such claustrophobic spaces are also related to stoppages of time. She claims that because Palestinians are prohibited from traveling freely and their space is blocked, time is interrupted and the future is suspended, which "places a special burden on memory which, paradoxically, has to be oriented toward the future in order to be meaningful: Performative memory is instrumental and forward-looking" (Hedges 71). Though she does not use the same terminology, it would seem that Gertz would agree with Hedges as she point out that cramped spaces convey a sense of endless exile, particularly in Masharawi's films ("The Stone" 29). Such an endless exile is suspended in time, the characters are not able to move forward, so they exist in an often cyclical series of mundane events that repeats daily.

Upon viewing the films, it becomes clear that the relationship between tight, blocked, claustrophobic home spaces and the seemingly endless cycles of repetition and daily tedium produce closed chronotopes. Naficy argues that closed chronotopes can be therapeutic, strategic or pathological (191). For Palestinian film they are most often strategic in that they give “exiles an iconography both to critique the home and host societies and to construct new identities” (Naficy 191), though one could argue they are sometimes pathological as well. The vast majority of Palestinian films situate closed chronotopes as means of expressing the constraints of living under occupation in the West Bank or Gaza or as unequal citizens in Israel. In films like Masharawi’s *Curfew*, the pervasive claustrophobic chronotopes border on pathological in that the film offers no visual or temporal way out. As mentioned in chapter two, Masharawi includes minor events that gesture towards hope, but the space depicted in the film remains small, cramped and closed off, time stands still, and the visual space offers only confinement and immobility. However, *Curfew*, is not a typical Palestinian film in a spatio-temporal sense. Far more often, Palestinian filmmakers employ closed chronotopes to destabilize space and time in order to open up spaces of resistance. Naficy explains that closed chronotopes emphasize discontinuity and rupture but also “serve the comforting and critical functions of embodying the exiles’ protest against the hostile social conditions in which they find themselves” (187). Closed chronotopes, despite their claustrophobic, agoraphobic, panicked structures of feeling, can contain forms of protest and rebellion against these structures as well. One method of resisting the shrinking of space through cinema is to “to focus on one small, isolated detail and to turn it into a symbol of wholeness and totality ” (Gertz and Khleifi "Palestinian" 325). For example, rather than the broad, grounding shots of houses and buildings in Khleifi’s *Wedding in Galilee*, Suleiman focuses on parts of his parents’ home, the porch, kitchen or living room; for Soraya in

Salt of This Sea, her grandfather's money and house in Jaffa become emblematic of the whole of Palestinian history, loss, and oppression.

Palestinian filmmakers also combine chronotopes in order to offer spaces of resistance. With regard to *Canticle of the Stones*, Alexander argues that "the destabilization of space is [...] evident in Khleifi's continuous shifts between claustrophobic indoor shots and outdoor shots of open spaces, vast landscapes, and limitless skies. This fluid concept of space offers the interstices or, conversely, the everywhere-ness, in which resistance to occupation can emerge and memory can stand up against oblivion" (Alexander 171). Gertz and Khleifi argue that, because Palestinian filmmakers can no longer "inscribe the map" that presents a coherent space of home and land, directors use open chronotopes that often move vertically in order to "capture the heights' and, in this way, [...] control the space below by [the camera's] gaze" ("Palestinian" 323-4). In both of these readings, the fluidity of movement between open and closed chronotopes offers a visual space of resistance to the strictures of occupation. In Palestinian film, it is the in-between spaces, the interstices between open and closed chronotopes, that offer hope for resistance. Perhaps the most frequently used method of combining open and closed chronotopes in Palestinian films is the frequent use of footage both within and from cars and busses. Naficy argues that there "is always a dialectical relationship in the accented films between the inside closed spaces of the vehicles and the outside open spaces of nature and nation" (257). Nowhere is that relationship between open chronotopes of the moving landscape and closed chronotopes of the interior of the car clearer than in Palestinian films, where the car itself takes on a rebellious position against the borders that would confine the Palestinian population. Such oscillations between the closed chronotope of the interior of the car and the open chronotopes of traveling landscapes can be found in almost every film in this dissertation, from Khleifi to Jacir.

However, because cars are, in and of themselves, transitional space, I will deal more fully with their roll in representations of resistance latter in this chapter.

Similarly, the mutually reinforcing nature of closed and transitional chronotopes are frequently combined to represent and open new spaces of resistance in Palestinian films. Perhaps the best example of this combination is in *Omar*. Mendes argues that Naficy's concepts of closed chronotopes are particularly relevant to *Omar*, but she makes this claim while discussing Omar's wall-crossing escapades, which invoke transitional chronotopes as well. She claims that, in *Omar*, "the settings of most scenes are consistent with the time-space constructs of the 'closed chronotpes of imprisonment and panic' that may coexist with and even reinforce 'border' or 'third-space chronotopes" (Mendes 130). The combination of open and transitional chronotopes in the film allow Omar to reclaim vertical space and resist the closing off of Palestinian spaces through the separation wall.

Like closed chronotopes, transitional chronotopes are also pervasive in Palestinian films. According to Naficy, thirdspace, transitional chronotopes are those which include spaces such as airports, borders, and transportation vehicles and are typically associated with border crossing and journeying narratives (154). He further explains that borders are locations of transition, translation, and transgression (240) because they are "nodal sites of high intensity in which [crossers'] belonging and unbelonging are juxtaposed in often cruel, sometimes humorous ways" (246). Because of the highly politically and socially charged spaces surrounding the multiple layers of borders within the West Bank and Gaza, various transitional chronotopes in Palestinian films, including journeys in cars and scenes that take place at roadblocks and walls, have come to represent important facets of Palestinian identity as symbols of both oppression and resistance.

One of the few elements that all of the films in this dissertation have in common is their inclusion of scenes filmed within cars or through car windows. It is so common, in fact, that I would argue it is one of the most visually distinctive and consistent markers of the Palestinian fictional film accent. These shots likely began, at least in part, as the direct result of pragmatism. Dickinson explains that "the automobile is the safest place from which to film when traditional, static establishing shots leave one more vulnerable than exiting the protective vehicular space or provoking suspicion by parking" (146). Naficy argues that "vehicles provide not only empirical links to geographic places and social groupings but also metaphoric reworkings of notions of traveling, homing, and identity" (Naficy 257). In Palestinian fictional films, the car is most often used as a site of potential resistance, though the form of this resistance differs from film to film. Yaqub, writing across several different articles, has been the most prolific on the topic of cars as spaces of resistance within Palestinian film. She argues that the movements and journeys within Palestinian films are often misread as failed because they are typically not linear. However, she claims that many of these journeys are circular and that such circular journeys have a long history within Palestinian literature. She claims that, contrary to being failed journeys, circular journeys serve as utopian exhortations that "situate the present as the past of things yet to come" (Yaqub "Utopias" 307). She explains that films like *Layla's Birthday* contain circular journeys that act as "a guide for how to live in a present political context that characters cannot change, rather than as an ideal past to be recreated in the future" (Yaqub "Utopias" 312). The emphasis on survival under occupation through circular journeys within cars can also be seen in films like *Rana's Wedding* and in parts of Suleiman's trilogy and works to reinforce the ideology behind the *sumud* movement. In *Rana's Wedding*, the circular journey that Rana takes into the West Bank to retrieve Khalil, obtain the proper paperwork and wedding elements, and return to her

father's house in time demonstrate the importance of persistence in the face of the obstacles of occupation. Her ability to accomplish her goals in spite of roadblocks and ineffective bureaucracy can be read as a method of survival under occupation and the active practice of *sumud*. Similarly, ES frequently makes trips around Israel and forays into the West Bank that highlight the difficulties of accomplishing seemingly simple tasks such as ES's attempt at having a relationship in *Divine Intervention*. In these films, survival and simply navigating the frustrations of daily life are resistance. In this way, these films are able to capture both the oppression of Palestinians living under occupation as well as demonstrate their perseverance as resistance to that occupation.

However, the car can also be read as a more aggressive means of resistance, as a means of reclaiming lost space. Yaqub draws on *Paradise Now* as an example, arguing that "Abu-Assad uses the car as a Palestinian space that moves through hostile areas claimed by an Israeli military presence. [...] the car acts as a means for Palestinians to appropriate as their own a part of the contested space of streets and checkpoints" (Yaqub "The Palestinian" 74). However, as a site of resistance and reclaiming space, the car is somewhat unpredictable and transient in its utility. At checkpoints and roadblocks, Palestinians are frequently forced to abandon their vehicles in order to cross on foot and as the car moves, the camera is only able to temporarily capture landscapes. Attempts at reclaiming space and landscape through cars is typically tenuous at best. By highlighting both the ability of cars to reclaim space as well as their inability to hold it, such shots reinforce the difficulties of traveling while under occupation but also demonstrate the ways in which Palestinians resist such restrictions.

Perhaps equally as common as scenes filmed within and through cars are scene films in and around checkpoints, roadblocks, and walls—the various spatial architecture of the

occupation. According to Gertz and Khleifi, the roadblock is the space imbued with the most meaning in Palestinian films ("Palestinian" 321). These sites hold more potential for subversion and resistance, but also offer more crystalline views of oppression than many car scenes. Almost every Palestinian film contains at least one scene of a character being searched or questioned at a roadblock or checkpoint. Some of these depictions demonstrate the absurdity of the occupation, such as those in *Divine Intervention*, in which the Israeli soldier can be seen arbitrarily shuffling the Palestinian passengers from car to car before allowing them to pass through the road block. Other films stress the anxiety and difficulty the roadblocks and searches create for Palestinians, such as those in *Ticket to Jerusalem* when Jabir must take his vehicle off road and over hills to get to Jerusalem when the checkpoint is closed. However, the protagonists of Palestinian films are never deterred by roadblocks, walls, or checkpoints for very long and therein lays their potency as sites of resistance. The ability and willingness of Palestinians to subvert the infrastructures of occupation function to demonstrate the ineffectiveness and arbitrariness of those structures and, as a result, the occupation itself. Mendes argues that in *Omar*, the title character's vertical "performance of the wall"—his routine climbing of the wall—functions to subvert the wall and thereby the Israeli state. For Mendes, Omar uses his bare life to destabilize the material actuality of the wall and thereby deny the Israeli state of exception control over his bare life (129). This type of powerful visual resistance to occupation is only available at the transitional chronotopes of borders.

Both closed and transitional chronotopes in Palestinian fictional film serve the ideological function of working to shape Palestinian cultural identity and reinforce ideologies of resistance to occupation. Because of the nature of the Palestinian political situation, Palestinian

film almost always participates in various border discourses, but is also uniquely located within those discourses. Yaqub explains that within typical border discourse,

the liminal space is considered a transitory one that leads to and from defined national entities, but for Israelis and Palestinians the liminal phase or space is not moving either to a purer self-constitution or a uni-national future: liminality is, in fact, the permanent reality of their geopolitical situation. ("Utopias" 520)

Because Palestinian films are both structurally and thematically liminal, ever focused on the problems of dislocation, its treatment of space, time and location become particularly salient features. Ghosh and Sarkar argue that "most films about displacement establish the protagonist's identity and its destabilizations through attempts at, and failures of, self-location" (103), thus space and attempts at self-location in Palestinian films become paramount in shaping Palestinian identity, which then develops in complex and overdetermined ways within the films themselves. The frequent use of closed chronotopes throughout Palestinian fictional film indicates that Palestinian cultural identity is traumatized, bound, and frozen in time by the occupation. These chronotopes highlight the ways in which Palestinians are not free to shape their own identity, but are forced to respond and react to the strictures of occupation during the routines of their daily lives. Similarly, transitional chronotopes in the films present Palestinian identity as fractured and unstable, bound by checkpoints, roadblocks, borders and walls that dissect and disconnect Palestinians from each other and their land. Gertz and Khelifi explain that "the borders have [...] become a sign of oppression characterized by an Israeli definition of Palestinian as a non-existent, split or broken identity" ("Palestinian" 320). While these chronotopes certainly function to counter the Israeli narratives of Palestinian invisibility and the necessity of occupation, they do more than simply present Palestinians as the helpless victims of Israeli occupation and violence. Palestinian filmmakers use both closed and transitional chronotopes to open spaces of

resistance to the closing and dividing of space in the West Bank and Gaza. They predominantly function to reinforce ideologies of *smud* and highlight the resilience of the Palestinian people.

Weddings and Cultural Celebrations

Like the theme and tropes of blocked space, the motif of cultural celebrations that appears across Palestinian films functions to reinforce multiple ideological threads. In addition to the ideologies that blocked spaces also reinforce—those of an unjust occupation and resistance to it—cultural celebrations function to shore up Palestinian cultural identity and solidarity through an emphasis on shared traditions, ultimately presenting weddings and other cultural celebrations as a manifestation of resistance through *sumud*. Ball summarizes the importance of cultural expression within the Palestinian context succinctly:

Projects such as these not only testify to the significance of cultural expression as a recognition of the Palestinian people's humanity, but also nurture and preserve the narratives of Palestinians themselves. Collectively, they reveal that cultural expression is not a luxury but an essential need for Palestinians, akin to what the great anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon termed a 'literature of combat': a body of creative work that operates as a tool of resistance through its ability to voice suppressed narratives and mobilize a collective political consciousness through its construction of a 'national culture.'" (*Palestinian 3*)

However, these cultural traditions rarely go un-critiqued and often serve to highlight tensions within Palestinian society. Often, the result of this dual critique of both the occupation and Palestinian culture, is to present a Palestinian cultural identity that is pluralistic and hybrid rather than strictly reinforcing the logic of cohesion and unity in prior, political documentary films. Though various types of cultural celebrations within Palestinian films, including birthdays, funerals, and film screenings, function to problematize traditional notions of Palestinian culture, the most visible and salient representation of cultural celebrations in Palestinian cinema is the wedding, so my analysis will focus predominantly on weddings.

Both Salti and Yaqub highlight one of the reasons that weddings become such potent sites of representations and contestations of Palestinian identity in Palestinian film: weddings form a social space in which the public and private collide (Salti 45, Yaqub “The Palestinian” 57). According to Salti, “Weddings [...] provide a stage where individuals are cast in direct confrontation with their collectivity or community, in which prevailing notions of social roles and conventions guide behavior” (Salti 45). Typically, such social gatherings are meant to bring communities together around a shared set of traditions and principles. Yaqub argues that the complications presented in weddings, such as the presence of the military governor at the wedding in *Wedding in Galilee*, undermine the potential for the community to bond and, rather, creates and highlights fissures in the community instead (“The Palestinian” 62-3). Similar complications can be found in *Rana’s Wedding* and can also apply to other types of celebrations. In *Layla’s Birthday*, for example, Abu Layla is tasked with the seemingly simple goal of picking up a cake and birthday gift for his daughter’s birthday party that evening, an event meant to bring the family together to celebrate the birth of one of its members. However, the daily obstacles of occupation make even this simple task nearly impossible. Though he is able to gather together appropriate substitutes for the cake and gift that he initially wanted, these items are not ideal and the occupation has managed to interfere with an important, if relatively small, modern social practice that represents the formation of new traditions. Though Abu Layla’s travails cause him a seemingly never ending trail of trials and tribulations, he is able to gather the necessary items to celebrate his daughter’s birthday, thus bringing his family unit together; however, those trials and tribulations depicted throughout his day underscore the fracturing and disjunctures in the Palestinian community as the result of the occupation. Like with wedding celebrations, it is Abu

Layla's collision with the public as he tries to prepare for a social celebration that reveals the fractures and diversity in Palestinian cultural identity.

Because they function to shape cultural identity, weddings and other cultural celebrations and events are closely related to Palestinian cultural memory. Hedges's treatment of "performative memory" in the context of Palestinian cultural memory will be useful here. According to Hedges, performative memory entails the way in which the act of recollection (of remembering) functions to redefine ways of being in the world, rather than to simply describe the state of things (Hedges 66). Hedges explains that "by embodying the experience of exile, loss, oppression, and diaspora, Palestinian cultural manifestations create the shared world that has helped to define what it means to identify oneself as Palestinian today" (Hedges 67). She argues that films like Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* contribute "both to the project of reinforcing collective memory and of embodying an active, performative memory" (Hedges 69). Cultural celebrations such as weddings provide potent sites for the remembering, reenacting, and passing on of cultural traditions among communities. As previously mentioned, they also function as potent sites for questioning and reshaping those cultural traditions. The narration of cultural events such as weddings and the presentation of those events in films in such a way that recalls the trauma of occupation not only functions didactically in presenting ideologies of suffering under occupation and resistance to it, but also critically in presenting an internal critique of certain Palestinian norms and traditions.

Weddings and cultural celebrations that take place in the West Bank or Gaza almost always represent resistance to and overcoming occupation through *sumud*. Salti explains that the struggle to fulfill a wedding "is integral to the struggle for survival against the brutality of the occupation, the threat of extermination, and ultimately for liberation, independence and the right

to self-determination" (45). In Palestine, the very act of remaining, of persisting, is resistance and the act of not only existing, but also of carrying on cultural traditions under occupation is even more subversive. In this way, something as seemingly mundane as a wedding, a birthday, or a film screening takes on tones of resistance and also works to demonstrate the oppressive nature of the Israeli occupation. These demonstrations of oppression and acts of resistance then become deeply enmeshed in Palestinian cultural identity through their intertwining with these cultural celebrations. However, because of the dually critical nature of Palestinian fictional cinema, ideologies of resistance to the occupation are also coupled with direct challenges and resistance to what the directors see as the more archaic traditions of Palestinian culture and identity.

Both Salti and Yaqub emphasize the role of weddings as acts of constructing cultural identity in their analyses of *Wedding in Galilee* (Salti 48) and *Rana's Wedding* (Yaqub "The Palestinian" 70), respectively. However, these constructions of identity rarely go unproblematicized by Palestinian filmmakers. The role that cultural celebrations play in highlighting various tensions, particularly between generations, regarding methods of resistance, and traditional gender roles, within Palestinian society is the direct consequence of the previously mentioned colliding of individual and communal space. In highlighting these various tensions, Palestinian filmmakers work to problematize notions of stable Palestinian identity, typically by offering a hybridized, multifaceted identity instead. Gertz and Khleifi argue that "since the 1980s, Palestinian cinema has been striving to maintain a heterogeneous and open nature, despite a political situation that nurtures unity and isolation" (8). They add that Palestinian cinema does sometimes present both Israelis and Palestinians as homogenous monoliths but also point out that "Palestinian cinema also attempts repeatedly, in every possible way, to break down this image, to take it apart and to reassemble it, drawing from a mosaic of

classes, generations, genders, regions, and nations" (8). Fictional cinema, which only began to develop in Palestine in the late 1980s, seems to occupy a particularly fruitful position of possibility in challenging and reimagining traditional Palestinian cultural identity.

Layoun explains that it is through fiction, particularly the imaginary and figural aspects of fictional, that works such as fictional films can complicate traditional cultural binaries and articulate new relationships and possibilities. She argues that "it is precisely in this impossible imaginary too that the literary and cultural text can articulate other notions of community, other notions of honor, other notions of gendered citizenship than the predominant or putatively commonsense ones" (Layoun 95). In Palestinian fictional films, one of the most consistent notions that is critiqued and reimagined is that of gender roles and relations in the Palestinian community. Though not all Palestinian fictional films complicate gender roles in obvious ways, the overwhelming majority of filmmakers do in at least one of their films. Ball argues the fact that complicating gender paradigms in Palestinian films such as those by Khleifi and Suleiman, "evokes a model of nationhood that breaks away from traditional ideas of unity and embraces a fragmented, destabilized, and hybrid vision of Palestine" (Ball "Between" 3). Similarly, Yaqub argues that *Wedding in Galilee* and *Rana's Wedding* "question the existence and the efficacy of various binaries (public/private, cultural/political, spiritual/material) and explore the ramifications of defying these divisions" (Yaqub "The Palestinian" 58). Weddings and cultural celebrations provide a potent space for challenging and shaping Palestinian cultural identity. Rather than reifying Fatah's or Hama's ideologies of nationalism and traditional gender roles, Palestinian fictional film presents complex, hybridized notions of Palestinian culture and cultural identity by representing the ways in which various social spheres collide in the public spaces of weddings and other cultural expressions. Rather than using these gatherings as sites for reifying

nationalism, however, directors like Khleifi and Abu Assad use these potent sites for cultural identity to challenge gender stereotypes and question the role of traditional Palestinian nationalism.

Exile and Return: (Be)Coming Home

Another theme that is ubiquitous in Palestinian fictions cinema is that of exile and return. Like cultural celebrations, notions of exile and return often become bound up with notions of memory and nostalgia, but they are also intrinsically bound to notions of home and belonging as well. Naficy argues that exilic accented cinema almost always treats the idea of a return to the lost homeland. He claims that "it is the dream of a glorious homecoming that structures exile" (229), so such dreams occupy a disproportion space in the accented cinema of exiles. At this point, it is important to recall that there are crucial differences between exilic and diasporic populations. According to Tawil-Souri, exile involves a deep longing and dreaming for home whereas diaspora indicates a form of community across scattered members and lacks the implied misery and longing for home that exile includes (131). Palestinian filmmakers' proclivities for including home seeking journeys and nostalgic remembrances of the Palestinian homeland comfortably situate them amongst exilic, rather than diasporic, filmmakers. For Palestinians, dreams of a glorious homecoming are particularly salient in shaping personal and cultural identity due to Palestinians' history of loss and displacement. As Bresheeth notes, "the dispossession brought about by occupation is even deeper and more painful than 'just' losing home and country. The ultimate loss is that of losing your story, your identity, losing the right to tell your own story, your own history" ("A Symphony" 79). Because of the structure of Palestinian exile, returns to the homeland are presented in both literal and metaphoric ways in

Palestinian films. Most of the filmmakers live in exile, so narratives of the exile's return to the homeland are frequent in Palestinian fictional films. All three of Suleiman's films contain ES's return to Nazareth and the West Bank, Khleifi's *Canticle of the Stones* and *Zindeeq* contain exilic return journeys, and Jacir's *Salt of This Sea* is focused on Soraya's return to the West Bank. However, other filmmakers approach returns to the homeland symbolically through memory and nostalgia.

Bresheeth highlights the importance of home and storytelling to the development of Palestinian personal and cultural identity. He argues that "the foundation of *homeland* must be fortified by one's own story and storytelling. [...] Hence, the identity and the narrative must be regained, the *community* must be *imagined* anew, in order to exist in the future" ("A Symphony" 82). Palestinian cinema typically imagines a homeland through recounting memories and relying heavily on nostalgia. According to Alexander, the cinematic practice of documenting visits to their former villages or homes is one expression of Palestinians' aspirations to return to their homeland, to maintain a connection with their past and reinforce their sense of cultural identity in the present" (Alexander 157). The films also reinforce this connection to their past through images of village ruins or keys and furniture from abandoned homes which are used to synecdoche to represent the lost homeland and the desire to return. Though these images as well as techniques such as flashbacks or retelling of events, Palestinian cinema pulls images and memories from the past to create a present ideal of home. According to Bresheeth, "Palestinian cinema therefore exists on a series of exilic interstices--between fact and fiction, between narrative and narration, between the story and its telling, between *documentary* and *fiction*" ("A Symphony" 82). Palestinian fiction functions to stitch together images of a lost homeland to inform, shape and reimagine a sense of home and belonging for Palestinians in the present. This

concept of reimagining the homeland compliments Jankovic's idea that home and a sense of belonging are processual, rather than fixed ("Houses" 22).

Jankovic's analysis takes a somewhat different approach to ideas of home and belonging in Palestinian films than much of the extant literature on Palestinian fictional films. She employs concepts from queer theory in order to expand the idea of "home" beyond a space that is constituted through similarity, security and community to include an understanding of "home" as "already constituted through certain kinds of un-belonging" (21). Borrowing from Fortier, Jankovic posits home as product of both history and a variety of discursive forms that are then used to create the idea of 'home' through a creative process of negotiation that is never fully finished (21). She focuses on Palestinian women's films and those films' use of damaged or otherwise un-livable homes to pose questions" regarding home and belonging ("Houses" 10). She claims that these films "envision forms of belonging that defy conventional national modes, particularly those compelled and regulated by the Israeli state" ("Houses" 10). Her concept of home as processual is particularly useful in the Palestinian context in which ideas of home and belonging are severely contested and under siege by the Israeli occupation. If home and a sense of belonging are in a constant state of becoming, and constantly under a state of development and negotiation, Palestinian cultural productions that seek to tell Palestinian stories of home, such as fictional film, become an important part of that negotiation.

Jankovic's analysis also highlights the ways in which Palestinian conceptions of home and belonging defy traditional links between home and specific geographies. If the concepts of home and belonging are in more or less constant flux, they cannot be inherently and exclusively tied to specific geographic locations. Within the Palestinian context, place-based concepts of home and identity are central to Palestinian claims to a right of return, but also problematic for

exilic directors. Alexander notes that "experiences of exile and the desire for return break down the frequently assumed correlation between identity and a defined geographical space.

Palestinian filmmakers' notions of place, and their relationship to it, influence their articulation of identity" (Alexander 170). The location of exilic directors in the interstices of nations functions to prevent them from ever truly feeling at home in a given geographic location. As a result, the themes of return, home, and belonging often reflect those anxieties. However, Palestinians who remain in Israel after its founding also find themselves in a situation of internal exile, made to feel uncomfortable and out of place by the various apparatuses of occupation (checkpoints, roadblocks, walls, curfews, IDF presence). Palestinian filmmaker's presentation of home and belonging as fluid concepts directly reflects their and other Palestinians' anxieties of un-belonging. As a result, conceptions of Palestinian identity are typically presented as multifaceted, complex, hybrid and every evolving within the films themselves.

Concepts of exile and return as well as concepts of home and belonging are also frequently used to reinforce the ideologies of resistance. Jankovic argues that fluid concepts of home and its dislocation form stable foundations suggests the possibility for new alliances based on identity rather than the physical grounding of people ("Houses" 27). This type of alliance is particularly useful for exiles, such as Soraya who grew up in the United States, but manages to form an alliance with Emad, who grew up in the West Bank in *Salt of This Sea*. For exiles, the very act of returning and attempting to remain in the West Bank is an act of resistance against an occupation that would have all Palestinians erased from the territory. Images of home and belonging are also one of the most potent representations of *sumud* in Palestinian films. Telmissany argues that, specifically within Khleifi's films, "the story of dispossession is also a story of resistance, determination and land sacrifice for those who decided to stay in Israel" (79).

By focusing on Palestinians who refused to leave and helping to forging an identity that works to foster a sense of home and belonging in an occupied land, Palestinian cinema reinforces the ideological stance of *sumud*.

Images of Violent Resistance: Absences and Deflections

Within the Israeli/Palestinian context, perceptions and perpetrations of violence can become potent symbols of resistance for Palestinians or attempts at justification for continued occupation for Israelis. In this sense, images of various types of violence and the characterization of that violence as justified or terroristic is crucial to representations of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The characterization of *Palestinian violence*, specifically, is the most fraught representation due to its seemingly contradictory ability to justify violence both by and against Palestinians, depending on the context of the representation. Because visual representations designed to justify the Israeli Occupation do not occur in the set of Palestinian films I am treating in this dissertation, detailed discussions of such matters fall beyond the scope of this project. However, it is against such attempts at villainizing Palestinian violence and resistance that many fictional Palestinian films react and to which they offer counterhegemonic representations of Palestinians and Palestinian violence. Israeli hegemonic discourse's attempts to silence and erase the Palestinian presence in the region have relied heavily upon the construction of the image of Palestinians as violent and Palestinian resistance as illegitimate. In response, most Palestinian fictional filmmakers have sought to deny, minimize or otherwise mitigate acts of physical violence committed by Palestinians.

Though the films do not shy away from representing the verbal, spatial, and psychological violence of the occupation, they frequently avoid depictions of violent acts by

Palestinians. In the few instances of visual depictions of Palestinian violence, a number of techniques are used to mitigate the violence in the depictions. Because the spatial violence of the occupation is typically conveyed through blocked and claustrophobic spaces, a topic that was thoroughly discussed in prior sections of this chapter, and the psychological violence of occupation will be discussed in the following section, I will limit this section to discussions of visual representations of physical violence, or lack thereof, in the films. Though the films in general do not overtly support violent resistance, all of them function to subvert the hegemonic Israeli narrative of the violent, irrational Palestinian resistance fighter as terrorist through subverting stereotypes of Palestinians, confounding expectations of Palestinian violence, and denying or mitigating spectacles of Palestinian violence in the films. In each of these instances, the viewer is likewise implicated and challenged in these representations, and a dialectical relationship between viewer expectation and image representation arises, creating spaces for viewer contemplation and self-reflection rather than didactic instruction. Though their representations of violence are multifaceted, all of the films support the ideological narrative of Palestinians and Palestinian Fedayeen as rational, reasonable, but oppressed people with just claims to self-determination and function to counter claims to the opposite.

In regards to subverting stereotypes in the films, the filmmakers commonly undermine two different stereotypes: the stereotype that the male gender is coupled with violent or otherwise aggressive resistance and the stereotype that those who perpetrate violent resistance are mythic individuals who defy logic or representation. Oumlil offers a reading of the gender complexities in the scene from *Salt of this Sea* when Soraya confronts the Jewish woman who is living in Soraya's grandfather's pre-1948 home. Oumlil explains that in this scene, it is Soraya who is angry and violent, throwing a vase across the room, not Emad or Marwan. Contrary to

stereotypical portrayals of Arab men, Emad is the calm voice of reason in this scene. Oumlil argues that "Emad's ability to utter calming words challenges any notion of an inherently violent Palestinian man" (Oumlil "Re-Writing" 593). Though this is a single instance, there are many others throughout this body of films that subvert the stereotype of inherently violent Palestinian men or inherently passive Palestinian women. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention*, women, not men, are the primary sources of rebellion and producers of chaos. Though this depiction dances dangerously close to perceptions of women as instigators of *fitna*, chaos, the female characters in Suleiman's films produce chaos and instigate rebellion to positive ends, in relatively controlled way, and in the stead of men who are incapable of or fail to act. In both films, ES does little more than passively observe his surroundings. However, Adan, in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, harnesses the power of her flawless Hebrew accent and the coincidence of the walkie-talkie to interfere with the Israeli police, while ES's girlfriend in *Divine Intervention*, brings a guard tower down with the physical movement of her body across a blocked border and later becomes a ninja-like Feda'i in one of ES's fantasy sequences. In *Wedding in Galilee*, Samia, not her husband, tears her own hymen in order to preserve tradition and honor. In *Paradise Now*, Khalid is the more hot-tempered of the two would-be suicide bombers, but ultimately, it is Said, the quiet, pensive one who ultimately follows through with the bombing. In each of these instances, the stereotype of Palestinian male violence is thwarted, and the viewer is presented with an alternative representation of how both violence and resistance function in the Occupied Territories.

In addition to subverting gender stereotypes about violence, Palestinian fictional film also demystifies common ideas about who commits violence, including suicide bombers and resistance fighters, and why they commit such acts. The most frequently addressed instance of

demystifying contested violent identities is Abu Assad's treatment of suicide bombers in *Paradise Now*, but it is by no means the only film that seeks to complicate violence in the West Bank and Gaza. Ramsey-Kurz notes that "Abu-Assad gives geographical, temporal, historical, and cultural specificity to [terrorism] and contests the popular consensus that the violence of terrorism is a [...] creepily anonymous, intangible force, able to strike anyone, anywhere, and at any time" (222). In adding such context to suicide bombers, Abu Assad humanizes them and pulls them from the realm of the taboo.

Though Abu Assad's complex treatment of suicide bombers is perhaps the most recognizable instance of demystifying perpetrators of violence, Palestinian films also work to demystify the Fedayeen, both in the past and present. The Palestinian freedom fighter, or *Feda'i*, is a frequent trope in Palestinian fictional films. Many references to and symbols of the *Fedayeen* surface throughout Palestinian fictional films, particularly the black and white *kufiyah*. Though the Fedayeen typically played a peripheral role in the earlier fictional films—often through references to or the return of a relative who was away fighting with the Fedayeen, or a brief shot of *kufiyah*-wrapped head—later films have consistently begun attaching faces and stories to the previously anonymous freedom fighter. Suleiman turns ES's girlfriend into a somewhat enigmatic *Feda'i* in *Divine Intervention*, but both Jacir and Abu Assad add further characterizations to the resistance fighters. In *When I Saw You*, Jacir's protagonist, Tarek, finds himself in a Fedayeen camp with men and women who train during the day and relax at night. This group of Fedayeen is not anonymous or mysterious; they all have names and personalities that Tarek and the viewer come to know. While Jacir works with the past Fedayeen, Abu Assad takes up modern resistance networks in *Omar*. Like Jacir, Abu Assad's protagonists are resistance fighters, but unlike Jacir, he does not paint them with idealized strokes. Rather, Abu

Assad's characters demonstrate some of the deep betrayals and fissures that form within modern day resistance cells in the West Bank. As Gana points out "contemporary Palestinian film, specifically Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now*, reopens the corridors of distant empathizing and shakes awake the intoxicating slumbering of our sobering imaginative impulses" (21) and it does so primarily through demystifying the characters who have long been the recipient of dehumanization and vilification because of their connections to violent resistance.

Contemporary Palestinian films, however, goes further than simply muddying previous stereotypes of violent Palestinians. Palestinian filmmakers typically refrain from depicting acts of Palestinian violence even when such acts are directly referred to in the films. The most obvious example of this technic is Abu Assad's refusal to depict Said's final suicide bombing. Gana has written extensively on the ways in which *Paradise Now* collapses the spectacle of violence:

rather than stage the terrorist act as a climactic spectacle, the film arouses in its viewers the desire for the spectacle of terror, the desire to enjoy what is morally reprehensible, and simultaneously disallows the spectacle from materializing before their eyes. (36)

By refusing to represent the violent act of the bombing itself, Abu Assad denies the spectators the spectacle for which the entire film has been preparing them. He does this again at the end of *Omar*. The last shot of the film is Omar pointing a gun at Rami's head, and as the viewer hears a gunshot, the screen cuts to black. In films where violence is not denied a screen presence, the filmmakers often mitigate Palestinian culpability by either situating the violence at the hand of the Israelis or in the realm of Palestinian fantasies or substitutions. The most graphic violence in any of the previously mentioned films is the chilling scene of Omar's torture in Abu Assad's *Omar*. Though the viewer witnesses Omar, Amjad and Tarek shoot the Israeli soldier in the beginning of the film, the violence happens at a distance. There is no blood, no obvious signs of

suffering and the incident is over quickly. Omar's questioning and torture, however, is graphic and visually disturbing. Omar is bound and hanging by his wrists, his feet barely able to touch the floor. He is naked, his face streaked with blood. His answers are frequently met with additional beatings and abuse. This type of violence is not typically displayed in Palestinian fictional films, so it is critical that in this instance, the most visually graphic scene in any of the Palestinian fictional films in this dissertation, the violence is at the hands of the Israeli soldiers. Though *Omar* contains the most marked visualization of physical Israeli violence, several other films include this method of deflection as well. In *Curfew*, the men are violently removed from their homes by the IDF, some being beaten and taken away while others are forced to sit with hands bound and await their fate, and in *A Tale of Three Jewels*, Yusef, a young child, is gunned down by an Israeli soldier.

Though visual depictions of physical violence by Palestinians are also included in the films, they are typically mitigated by fantasy or substitutions. Frequently, Suleiman counters and denies expectations of violence in his films when he offers the reader an image that invokes or directly depicts violence—the grenade and gun in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* or the gang of boys beating something out of the sight of the camera with a stick—only to then diffuse that image through an unexpected revelation—the grenade and gun are both cigarette lighters and the boys are beating a snake, not a person. Thus, these images become a yet another example of the pervasiveness of state violence and resistance violence on the lives of the Palestinian population rather than an concession to stereotypes regarding violent Palestinians. Though Suleiman most regularly uses both deflection and fantasy to mitigate the violence of Palestinians in his films, other filmmakers like Jacir and Abu Assad also periodically deflect Palestinian violence onto objects rather than people. For example, both Soraya in *Salt of This Sea* and Khaled in *Paradise*

Now break nearby objects—a vase at Soraya’s grandfather’s home, and the angry customer’s bumper respectively—rather than physically assault other characters. Suleiman in particular, also uses fantasy to mitigate Palestinian violence. Perhaps the best example of this is the ninja Feda’i scene from *Divine Intervention*. Suleiman’s Feda’i kills six presumably Israeli men who are using her image as target practice. However, because of this scene’s obvious fantasy elements, it does not function to associate Palestinians with violent behavior. Rather, through fantasy, absurdity and humor, it works to distance Palestinians from accusations of terrorism and violence.

By consistently countering stereotypes and denying or mitigating the violent spectacles that haunt the edges of Palestinian film, these filmmakers also implicate the viewer and his or her desires and expectations of violence in the struggle to represent Palestinians. While Gana, Aaron, and Thomas indicate this process takes place in *Paradise Now*, specifically, I would argue that it also applies to more subtle or minor depictions of violence and their denial or deflection, though these audience implications are more implied than those in *Paradise Now*. Thomas argues that *Paradise Now* “appropriates stylized images of consumable violence and culturally-sanctioned points of empathetic identification,” but also problematizes these audience desires and thereby highlights the complicity of the viewer (444). Aaron explains that the way in which *Paradise Now* accomplishes this indictment of audience desires is by including both the making and selling of the collaborator and martyr videos. By including these scenes, Aaron argues, the film “keeps pointing to the audience for such spectacles as both eager and suspect, as subject to ridicule and disapproval” (88). While *Paradise Now* draws direct connection between the viewer’s expectation and desire for spectacles of violence and their complicity in the perpetuation of that violence using the commercialization of martyr and collaborator videos and

then foils those desires in the final scene of the film, other filmmakers use a similar building up of expectation and thwarting of those expectations of Palestinian violence to similar ends.

Suleiman's thorough use of situational irony in *Divine Intervention* is perhaps the best and most consistent example of this phenomenon, but Jacir's reversal of gender stereotypes in *Salt of This Sea* is also a good example. Though the implications of the audience's complicity in producing the conditions that create and legitimize Palestinian stereotypes and violence are more subtle in these films, the implication is still present as is the potentiality for contemplation. The repeated, jarring effect of building up expectations and then refusing to fulfill those expectations makes the viewer more acutely aware of their own complicity in stereotype reproduction. Drawing attention to the viewer's complicity in constructing and even desiring the stereotypical violence associated with Palestinians and then refusing to complete that construction or satisfy that desire functions to open spaces of potential for the examination and deconstruction of these stereotypes and violent associations because such cultural undercurrents can only be dismantled once they are brought to the surface of consciousness.

Psychology: From Symbolic to Realistic

Psychological trauma is represented in two different ways in Palestinian films: realistically and symbolically. Though these two representations offer different forms and address different types of psychological repercussions from the Israeli Occupation, they both ultimately function to highlight and support the ideological narrative of Palestinian victimhood and the importance and difficulty of identity formation despite the trauma of occupation. Though recent films have trended toward more literal representations of Palestinian trauma, much of the

literature on Palestinian cinema and trauma has revolved around the methods of symbolic expression employing a psychoanalytic approach.

Most of the extent literature on Palestinian film and trauma addresses the ways in which the films treat the trauma of exile, lost homeland, and occupation collectively and symbolically. Gertz and Khleifi situate their analysis using Freudian psychoanalytic theory as an underpinning. They argue that Palestinian history is a traumatic one that ultimately results in an historical time loop of the traumatic event. The national trauma is repressed by the unconscious and cannot be integrated into a sequential or causal narrative of events. This repressed trauma is then prone to resurface and inhibit the integration of present experience into a sequential, causal narrative. They argue that "Eventually the trauma remains as a living event, enduring and unchanging, as if fully present rather than merely represented in memory" (*Palestinian* 3). The joint phenomena of the trauma's inability to be incorporated into and remain a part of a past narrative and its continual reemergence into the present as a living event halts time within the films (*Palestinian* 3). Also drawing upon Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, Bresheeth argues that Palestinians are not experiencing mourning for their collective losses, but melancholy. He goes on to argue that "understanding [Palestinian losses] in terms of melancholy provides new insight into the state of stasis, where resistance is temporarily disabled, delaying the process of mourning and healing." (Bresheeth "A Symphony" 78-9). Layoun also draws connections between Palestinian historical trauma and the collapse of the past and future into an indeterminate present (100). More than Gertz and Khleifi or Layoun, however, Bresheeth draws connections between memory as the basis of myth and narrative and narrative and myth as the basis for organizing reality and the past. Because of these relationships between narrativizing the past as myth and using myth to organize reality, Bresheeth argues that these stories and the telling of these stories is the basis for

personal and national identity ("The Nakba" 503). But what happens when, as Bresheeth, Layoun, and Gertz and Khleifi indicate, when those narratives lose the signification between past, present, and future, when a sense of time collapses into the present and the chain of signification is complicated or broken entirely?

Jameson provides an explanation in his discussion of Lacanian schizophrenia as a postmodern affliction and the resulting tendency toward fragmentation that arises as a result . Because he states the concept relatively succinctly, Jameson is worth quoting at length here:

Meaning on the new view is generated by the movement from signifier to signifier. What we generally call the signified--the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance--is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers. The connection between this kind of linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a two fold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present; and second ,that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. (Jameson 26-7)

The four previously mentioned scholars are essentially describing the same phenomenon as Jameson, but Jameson situates it in a larger context: that of postmodernism's tendency to fragment and destabilize history and meaning. Where the Palestinian context differs from the postmodern tendency writ large is in that Palestinian filmmakers' tendency toward fragmentation is the result of the trauma of denied homeland and lost identity that is then frequently coupled with and expressed through postmodern fragmentation of time and history in their films. I would not venture so far as to characterize Palestinian fictional film as entirely or intentionally

postmodern in an aesthetic sense, though filmmakers like Elia Suleiman can certainly be characterized as such. However, Palestinian cultural memory does suffer from crisis in historicity that is even more acute than any naturally developed disconnect with the historical past in Western postmodernism because the Palestinian crisis in historicity is also forced by the Israeli dominance of the historical narrative of the region and the systematic denial and repression of the Palestinian version of historical events. As such, Palestinians, particularly those in diaspora, have an even more difficult time attaching signifiers to the historical signified.

This difficulty in attaching meaning to symbol results in the fragmentation of time in the films, which is typically represented through mentally unstable characters, often cast in the “village fool” trope, particularly in older films. Khleifi’s *Wedding in Galilee*, Nassar’s *The Milky Way*, and Masharawi’s *Haifa* each contain characters that symbolize the schizophrenic collapse of time and history and the resultant inability to form a coherent identity. The instability in these characters is also, importantly, linked to the trauma of the Palestinian people. In *Wedding in Galilee*, the *mukhtar*’s parents are both presented as at least somewhat senile. They frequently confuse time or reference their personal past in reference to current happening. Layoun argues that “such ‘senile’ interruptions by the grandfather and the grandmother are, more properly, punctual reminders of alternative ways of seeing the present in light of the past. Their disruptive outbursts of apparent senility are simultaneously astute commentary on what no one else wants to admit or remember” (Layoun 100). The grandfather’s comments about the British and Turkish occupations of Palestine and the grandmother’s repeated references to her past suitors represent the collapsing of the past into the present and the schizophrenic fragmentation of the Palestinian history and identity. The *mukhtar*’s parents become the physical embodiment, often confused

and incoherent, of a Palestinian identity that has repeatedly tried and been prevented from fully constituting itself as the result of repeated interventions and occupations.

Masharawi offers a younger but also mentally inchoate character to represent the schizophrenic fragmentation of Palestinian identity in the modern era. Nadeel, also referred to as Haifa in the film because of his refrain of “Jaffa, Haifa, Acka!” is the village simpleton. He is an innocent and kind-hearted character that more or less takes care of himself, but is occasionally somewhat annoying to the villagers. Like the *mukhtar*’s parents in *Wedding in Galilee*, Nadeel functions as a reminder of the broken Palestinian past. He sings “the Turks came to us and built mosques and left. The British came to us and built prisons and left. The Jews came and swallowed up the country without much effort and increased the number of jails. Well, what about the Palestinians? Will they build us gardens?” Unlike the *mukhtar*’s parents, however, Nadeel’s chronologic confusion is more directly connected to the trauma of expulsion from his home village. He continually repeats the names of conquered Palestinian cities (Jaffa, Haifa, Acka) and naïvely believes that his engagement to his cousin, Latifa, will still one day be fulfilled. He is unable to reconcile his past, the trauma of exile, and his present situation and, as a result, clings to an impossible future. While the *mukhtar*’s parents function as vestiges of a history that can no longer be reached or experienced in concrete terms, Nadeel becomes a vessel and representative of how past traumas break the chain of signification between past, present and future, highlighting the difficulties of forming a consistent and coherent identity for Palestinians.

Nassar makes the connection between trauma and the difficulties of identity formation even more explicit in *The Milky Way*. Two characters, Mabruk and Jamila are depicted as simple and both have a history of trauma beyond the loss of homeland which are linked to their mental deficiencies in the film. Jamila witnessed her mother’s murder and has not spoken since. She

also suffers from nightmares and flashbacks. Mabruk similarly suffers from flashbacks of 1948, where is surrounded by dead bodies. For these two characters, the past can be recalled into the present at any time and they experience as real. The trauma of the Nakba has fractured the psyches of both Jamila and Mabruk and disrupted their sense of time.

All of these characters have a tenuous grasp of chronology and, therefore, identity. Jameson explains that if “the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experiences, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments'" (25). Though I hesitate to make claims as to the chronological processing capabilities of the directors themselves as postmodern subjects, Khleifi, Masharawi, and Nassar have all constructed characters who, as cultural products, are severely fragmented. They represent fractured identities that struggle to constitute themselves due to their inability to distinguish from past, present, and future, which contributes to their inability to construct a coherent past narrative from which to build a coherent identity. It is important to remember, however, that these characters are all secondary characters in films that follow traditional narrative formats. Thus they represent an important facet of the struggle to form a Palestinian identity, but the films themselves are structurally and temporally coherent outside of these characters. These characters represent the Palestinian struggle to form and maintain a definitive national or cultural identity and function symbolically to represent the ways in which trauma contributes to what can be described as an absence of collective meaning and history and the struggle to overcome that absence.

In this postmodern absence of collective meaning and history, Palestinian filmmakers have increasingly relied on individual, subjective experiences of identity formation and trauma.

These experiences more closely align with symptoms of modern psychological processes and disorders, predominantly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD (American Psychological Association 271). Though these experiences remain, to some degree, an expression of collective Palestinian experience and identity, the focus of such representations remains on individual experiences, that may be experienced by many, but not necessarily all Palestinians, rather than symbolic representation of collective trauma. Because these experiences are not meant to be symbolic representations of a greater national identity, they are more tailored to different individual experiences of trauma, which are consequently more realistic. Rather than representing the difficulties of identity formation under the pressure and erasure of occupation like the postmodern schizophrenic representations previously mentioned, these realistic, individualized representation function to underscore the real-world horror of the consequences of occupation. The characters in films such as *Omar*, *Layla's Birthday*, *When I Saw You*, *In the 9th Month*, *Paradise Now*, and Suleiman's trilogy exhibit clear and widely recognized psychological responses to trauma. While it is not my intention or goal to "diagnose" these characters in a professional sense or to claim that they suffer from any type of abnormal psychological reactions, the characteristics they exhibit are well known and highly associated with conditions produced by traumatic experiences.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, the primary tool for guiding psychiatric diagnoses in the United States, indicates that PTSD can form from experiencing or witnessing others experience "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (American Psychological Association 271). The symptoms that can arise from such trauma include: intrusive memories of the traumatic event, recurrent dreams, flashbacks, avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, inability to remember aspects of the traumatic

experience, persistent negative emotional states such as anger, fear, guilt or shame, feelings of detachment from others, irritable behavior, angry outbursts, and reckless and self-destructive behavior (American Psychological Association 271-2). According to the *DSM-5*, PTSD can also occur with symptoms of depersonalization, “persistent or recurrent experiences of feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of, one’s mental processes or body,” or derealization, “persistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings” (American Psychological Association 272). The *DSM-5* is also careful to indicate that PTSD is a varied syndrome that presents in myriad ways and is inextricably linked to the individual and his or her personal experience of the trauma (American Psychological Association 274). It is not difficult to see glimpses of these traits in the characters of Palestinian fictional films. In addition to the *DSM-5*’s classification of PTSD, Herman has proposed that there is an additional form of PTSD that develops as the result of prolonged, repeated trauma which she terms Complex PTSD (CPTSD) (“Complex PTSD”; “CPTSD”). Though this diagnosis was not included in the *DSM-5* as separate from PTSD, another diagnostic manual that is used around the world, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), did choose to include CPTSD as a separate diagnosis with a different line of treatment in its most recent edition (Landy et al. 215). While the debate as to whether or not CPTSD should be included as a distinct diagnosis rages on in the psychology and trauma literature with opponents to its distinction from PTSD such as Resick et al. and Landy et al. and proponents, such as Herman and Bryant, the characteristics that Herman indicates in her original article on CPTSD are not debated. The current debate is over whether or not these characteristics are distinct enough from the current PTSD criteria to warrant a separate construct and require a different form of treatment (Resick et al. and Landy et al.). Because the symptoms of persons who have been exposed to repeated trauma are not in question, only the

degree to which CPTSD has sufficient construct validity distinct from PTSD is in question, and because much of the Palestinian population has experienced multiple qualifying traumas at the hands of the Israeli government and the occupation, the criteria for CPTSD are a fitting guideline for examining how characters in Palestinian films present realistic mental health issues.

According to Herman, captivity is necessary to induce CPTSD. She argues that “prolonged, repeated trauma can occur only where the victim is in a state of captivity, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator. Examples of such conditions include prisons, concentration camps, and slave labor camps” (377). Given the geographical restrictions and the prison-like quality of the occupation, the current situation in Palestine would appear to offer ripe conditions for the development of CPTSD. The distinctions that Herman highlights in the symptoms of CPTSD include an amplification of somatic, physiological, symptoms including anxiety and agitation (“Complex” 380); higher rates of dissociation, including problems with memory, concentration, and sensing time (“Complex” 381); and affective changes such as prolonged feelings of abandonment, depression, humiliation, rage and anger (“Complex” 382). The prolonged trauma of occupation takes a mental toll on Palestinian subjects in a literal way and this toll is demonstrated through the levels of anger, depression, paranoia, and dissociation in several protagonists of the previously mentioned films. These are not disorders, in and of themselves, but natural responses to being placed under traumatic experiences for prolonged periods of time.

Anger and irritability infuse depictions of the average Palestinian in many films. Angry outburst or excessively harsh responses are common. Suleiman draws particular attention to this phenomenon in *Divine Intervention* in which a simmering anger seems to have taken hold of the residents of Nazareth. While Nazareth is within the bounds of the Israeli state, it is a

predominantly Palestinian city and its citizens suffer from routine injustices and restraints that produce similar, if not as severe, responses to those in the West Bank and Gaza. The opening scene of the film, for example, shows ES driving through the city, cursing everyone he passes. Later, the film introduces a series of seeming overreactions to relatively minor annoyances: a man rips off the license plate of a neighbor's car who is parked in the wrong spot, an older man deflates a soccer ball that a group of kids has accidentally kicked onto his roof, a pair of men repeatedly get out of a car in the midst of an argument, among other things. The same type of simmering anger creeps up in other films, but not as consistently: the angry customer in *Paradise Now*, the irritable men in the café in *Layla's Birthday*, irritable neighbors in *Ticket to Jerusalem* and *Haifa*. While anger in and of itself is not an unusual or pathological emotion, the persistence of anger, irritability or excessively angry responses can be a sign of stress and anxiety. In these instances from the films, the simmering anger represents the toll that the constant stress and anxiety that the occupation and the precariousness of their situation places on the Palestinian population.

The feelings of sadness, loss, loneliness, hopelessness that often result from exile are compounded by the occupation and come to the fore in several Palestinian films. Perhaps the clearest example of such emotions is in Jacir's *When I Saw You*. Ghaydaa and Tarek have been exiled from their home in Palestine as a result of Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Because of this exile, she struggles with loneliness and sadness while in the refugee camp, particularly during the beginning of the film. There are several scenes of Ghaydaa at night, where the framing highlights the isolation and loneliness she feels while trying to raise her son, without her husband, in a refugee camp. In one such scene, Ghaydaa sits on the foot of the bed, smoking a cigarette while Tarek sleeps. She and Tarek are as far away from each other as possible within

the frame of the camera. A shaft of light falls on Ghaydaa, but the shot is otherwise dark. The monotonous pattern of the slats on the wall add to the sense of loneliness and tedium of the shot. In *Haifa*, Abu Said experiences sadness as a result of his inability to become a police officer, in *Salt of This Sea*, Emad is hopeless about getting a visa, and there are many instances of sadness related to funeral processions and death. Such feelings of grief and depression after relocation and loss are usual and proper, but their repeated depiction in these films functions to highlight the degree of suffering of the Palestinian people at the hands of the occupation.

Paranoia and dissociation, both of which appear in Palestinian films, are well known responses to traumatic events and conditions. While paranoia and hyperawareness of one's surroundings are frequent effects of repeated trauma, dissociation is typically a coping mechanism during an ongoing trauma and can vary greatly in presentation and severity. Abu Assad specifically focuses on the problems that the paranoia created by the occupation create for the Palestinian community in *Omar*. Omar, despite not cooperating with Israeli intelligence, is assumed to be a collaborator upon his release from prison. Both his love interest, Nadia, and his lifelong best friends, Amjad and Tarek, suspect him. As mentioned in chapter three, such paranoia was inspired by Abu Assad's real life experiences while filming *Paradise Now* and reflect actual problems that face the Palestinian community. Such suspicions and paranoia can also be seen in Abu Layla in *Layla's Birthday*, and Abu Karem in *Paradise Now*.

Another trauma-related response that appears frequently in later Palestinian fictional films is dissociation. Dissociation is a method of coping with psychological stress by withdrawing from reality and self to some degree. Suleiman's trilogy offers the best example of a character, ES, who seems to be oddly dissociated from his surroundings. In *Chronicle of Disappearance*. ES is repeatedly depicted as invisible to the Israeli soldiers and police; however,

these feelings of invisibility are also symptomatic of dissociating and disconnecting from his surroundings. The frequent use of fantasy and dreaming in *Divine Intervention*, *Tale of the Three Jewels*, and *Whispering Embers* are also all mild versions of dissociating from the psychological strain of occupation or life under Israeli rule in Israel.

On an ideological level, realistic representations of mental health problems that result from the occupation function to underscore Palestinian victimhood and to counter the Israeli narrative of Palestinians as the aggressors in the conflict. By demonstrating the suffering of the Palestinian people, not only on a physical level but also on a psychological level, Palestinian fictional filmmakers further highlight the injustice of the occupation of Palestine. Both the symbolic schizophrenic representation of the loss of identity and the disjunctures of historical past, present and future in the character trope of the village fool and the realistic depiction of the psychological struggles of the modern Palestinian population reify and work to make visible the ideological narrative of Palestinian suffering and victimhood and, simultaneously, work to delegitimize the Israeli occupation.

Conclusions

Through this analysis, one can see that Palestinian fictional film, contrary to its predecessors in Palestinian documentary film, has moved away from unitary, utilitarian notions of Palestinian national identity toward a nuanced, multiperspectival depiction of Palestinian experiences which works to reconceptualize traditional ideas of Palestinian identity. Through the themes of blocked space and time, cultural celebrations, exile and return, visual violence, and psychological trauma, Palestinian filmmakers insist on Palestinians' status as victims of the Israeli occupation and confirm the ideologies of Palestinian resistance through *sumud* and the

reclaiming of space. The filmmakers also offer a vision of Palestinian identity that is fragmented, traumatized, and spatially and temporally bound, but also resilient, hybrid, complex, and ever evolving.

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Chapter Five: The Palestinian Cinematic Accent

While each individual director possesses a distinct filmic accent, their combined body of work, along with that of other Palestinian directors, functions to create a definitive accent of Palestinian fictional cinema. However, as Naficy explains, filmic accents are not stagnant, monoliths and the Palestinian accent is no exception. Though fictional feature length Palestinian film still undoubtedly falls under the category of accented cinema, there has been a definitive shift in recent years away from an emphasis on the land and village, common tropes in reifying national identity through accented films, and toward an emphasis on individual, yet common, experiences of occupation and exile. This shift in content, has been accompanied by changes in how the films are financed, created, distributed and viewed as well. Though much about these changes remains squarely in the realm of the usual for accented cinema in general, Palestinian cinema deviates from the norm in several regards, the most consistent and prominent of which are in response to the restrictions of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the politics that surround that occupation in the international sphere. As in chapters two and three, because financial and technical aspects of filming are deeply enmeshed, I will discuss Palestinian film's technoscapes and financescapes together. I will also treat mediascapes and ethnoscapescapes together because of their close ties. Ideoscapes will be treated in their own section and I will draw from my analysis on these "scapes" to delineate key features of the fictional Palestinian filmic accent, how it has shifted over time, and what changes may be in store for its future.

Naficy delineates two general modes of production for accented filmmakers: collective and interstitial. The collective mode, according to Naficy, involves collaboration between filmmakers to produce a "collective enunciation" in which filmmakers and audiences are joined by their various participation in communities of address (45). The interstitial mode, in contrast,

involves accented filmmakers who live and work in the interstices of society and the film industry (46). Palestinian film falls most clearly into the interstitial category of production; however, the Palestinian mode of film production also involves elements of the collective. Naficy describes how Iranians tend to work interstitially but also share a collective element through their "shared experience of otherness, their films' common themes, and the manner of the films' exhibitions" which have also served to create a type of informal collective consciousness (Naficy 73). The same can be said of Palestinian cinema. Palestinians in diaspora as well as those currently living under occupation share a sense of otherness, like the Iranians, but they also share a sense of historical trauma and oppression.

In addition to this informal collective consciousness, however, Palestinian fictional filmmakers, especially the earlier directors, also work together in various shifting relationships. Palestinian fictional filmmakers generally work independently rather than form organizations like film collectives to support their projects, but that does not mean they do not work with one another and learn from each other. Though I would describe the collective element of Palestinian filmmakers more as partnerships than collectives, there is still a sense of community and cooperation among many of the directors. After charting the accent of Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, Ali Nasser, Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu Assad, and Annemarie Jacir, productive and important connections can be identified between the filmmakers, despite their generally individualized, interstitial mode of production. Khleifi formed two different production studios, Sindibad Films and Sourat Films, with Palestinian filmmaker and philanthropist, Omar al-Qattan, while Masharawi and Abu Assad later formed Ayloul Films to help produce their projects. Masharawi worked as a set carpenter on Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee*, and Khleifi's films gave Abu Assad the necessary hope he needed to attempt his own film career (Bryant). Abu Assad

also worked on several of Masharawi's films as an assistant director or producer (Gertz and Khleifi 47). It would seem, then, that especially for the earlier filmmakers, some collaboration and partnerships were vital to creating their films and developing their talent and networks. These partnerships, though interesting and undoubtedly influential on the Palestinian filmic accent, are not sufficient to consider the Palestinian mode of production to be collective. The interstitial approach, as defined by Naficy, is much more representative of how Palestinian filmmakers create their products, but this collective element also works to distinguish Palestinian filmmaking from other types of purely interstitial accented filmmaking.

Naficy argues that the interstitial mode is marked by five facets: [1] accented filmmakers spend copious amounts of time finding funding for their films, often creating long periods of time between projects (47); [2] labor tends to accumulate on the directors of accented films rather than be disbursed among different entities (48); [3] interstitial accented films typically involve multilinguality both within the film and amongst the crew and audience (49-50); [4] both the conditions of filming and producing interstitial accented films are convoluted and complex (51); and [5] there is frequently a significant lag between the time a film is finished and when it is exhibited or distributed (51). Between its Technoscapes, Financescapes, Ethnoscapes, and Mediascapes, Palestinian fictional feature film production encompasses each of these elements; however, the occupation and Palestinians' political situation add additional complications to these facets of the interstitial mode of production that shape its unique accent. Naficy also argues that, in regards to themes and content, accented cinema tends to focus on journeys, identity formation, family, historicization, uncertainties about reality, and exile/displacement (290-1). Chapter four discusses the prominence of several of these themes in Palestinian fictional film, including journeys, identity, historicization, and exile/displacement, so this chapter will only

seek to differentiate how the Palestinian treatment of those themes differs from the treatment of those themes in other types of accented cinema. Specifically, Palestinian film's treatment of these themes is heavily influenced by the occupation and the desire to offer counter hegemonic narratives of Palestinian identity and existence.

Technoscapes and Financescapes:

The conditions under which finances are gathered for Palestinian fictional filmmakers appear quite similar to those faced by other accented filmmakers on the surface. Naficy explains that both the collective and interstitial modes of production for accented filmmakers "are undergirded by rhizomatically interlinked independent, nonprofit, political, and ethnoreligious organizations and by a variety of mediating cultural institutions" (43). Palestinian feature length fictional film certainly has a varied and rhizomatic funding structure. All six filmmakers that I studied had an array of difficulties in convincing their benefactors to fund them. Funding often fell through and budgets were periodically blown, only to be scabbled back together in order to start or complete the films. This facet, in and of itself, is not unique to Palestinian filmmakers, but the way in which the Israeli occupation and the politics surrounding the Occupied Territories affect funding options and availability is. The lack of film infrastructure and capital in the West Bank and Gaza is a result of the long standing Israeli occupation, and it is this lack of infrastructure and the desire to avoid cooptation after accepting Israeli funds that necessitates a reliance on foreign funding and equipment. However, the occupation and Israel's political representations that demonize Palestinians also make it more difficult to procure funding for socially or politically relevant fictional films. Directors like Michel Khleifi and Elia Suleiman find themselves having to justify the content of their films to foreign funders, while filmmakers

like Hany Abu Assad and Annemarie Jacir encounter extreme difficulties in garnering funding for films that go against the political grain.

Naficy describes dependence on the mainstream channels of funding and distribution as well as some autonomy from them as "the dual, differentially torqued, engines of the accented mode" (Naficy 45). While being required to finance their films through a variety of international sources is a burden for Palestinian filmmakers, the lack of reliance on a single government or national film industry for support also frees the directors to a certain degree. It is this push-and-pull between financial dependence and autonomy that forms the contours of Palestinian film's accent. Most filmmakers avoid accepting money from or working with Israel out of fears of cooptation and censorship. They frequently find more freedom for their content with European sources of financing but are often then restricted in other ways, such as crew selection and post production facilities. Abu Assad's crew and funding issues with *Paradise Now* offer a good example of how foreign financing can create budgetary problems. During filming, the violence in Nablus intensified for Abu Assad's large, multinational production crew. Six European members of the crew chose to quit out of fear for their safety. For Abu Assad, this resulted in frantic search to not only replace the crew members, but to also cover the costs of flying new crew members to Israel, which put him over budget (Abu Assad 6). Jacir faced similar restrictions from her financiers.

This type of international funding also contributes to the multilinguality of Palestinian film. Though multilinguality is, like multisource financing, not unique to Palestinian film, there are some important distinctions in Palestinian film's multilinguality. Considering the location of the films, one would expect some multilingualism in Palestinian cinema. Most Palestinian films contain both Arabic and Hebrew language and writing. Naficy points out that multilinguality

often involves privileging one language or mode of communication, and thereby one community of address, over others (51). For Palestinian cinema, Arabic is, understandably, privileged over Hebrew, and many films draw attention to the importance of accented language in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, for example demonstrates that the protagonist, Adan, can speak fluent Hebrew without an Arabic accent. This language is enough to gain her consideration for an apartment on the telephone, but as soon as the listeners realize she is actually an Arab, her attempts to find an apartment are dashed. At the end of the film, however, Adan is able to use her accent and a lost walkie-talkie to send the Israeli police force on a pointless race around the city. Accented language, both Arabic and Hebrew, in Palestinian films often functions as a social marker. The presence and persistence of the occupation necessitates at least bilingualism in all of the films addressed in this dissertation. The occupation also restricts the availability of financial and technical resources to Palestinian directors, forcing them to seek transnational sources that then, in turn, add additional layers of multilinguality to the set and production process. As previously mentioned, the financing of Palestinian films almost always involves a variety of European sources. Given the plethora of languages spoken in Europe, it is no surprise that the crew members who are frequently required to participate in making Palestinian films speak a variety of different languages. Though they clearly share enough languages in common to communicate, this multilinguality undoubtedly adds a layer of complexity to the filming and production of Palestinian films. However, language barriers are only one facet of the difficulties Palestinian directors face during their convoluted production processes.

Naficy explains that a common characteristic of accented films is that they have long, convoluted production processes (51). In this regard, again, Palestinian films are no exception,

and most of the twists and turns of Palestinian filmmaking are encompassed by Naficy's broad descriptions of the interstitial production mode. However, because of the occupation, Palestinian filmmakers face pressures and dangers while filming their works that not many fictional filmmakers, accented or otherwise, must face. There are not many fictional filmmakers who are required to sign a waiver accepting responsibility for their own deaths in the event that the occupying army should shoot them ("*Paradise Now*" 58). The occupation creates additional physical dangers for the filmmakers and their crew, but also conjures additional paper work, political acrobatics, and costly delays during the production of any film being shot in the West Bank or Gaza. Though the level of obstruction from the occupation varies with political movements and events that are taking place at the time of production, and therefore varies from film to film, all six of the directors in this work experienced extensive interference from the occupation and the Israeli government while making their films, and this interference can often be seen in the films themselves. Khleifi's *Tale of Three Jewels*, for example, includes footage that is atypical of his style because he was required to shoot a handful of scenes illegally, which resulted in somewhat rushed, rough images (Gertz and Khleifi "Tale of the Three" 209-10). Both Abu Assad and Jacir were required to shoot sections of their films in studio out of safety concerns or geographical restrictions. These types of changes alter the director's original plan and vision of the film and affect changes in the films themselves. Perhaps the best example of paperwork's potential interference with filming is Rashid Masharawi's *Ticket to Jerusalem*. After applying for the correct permits to film in Jerusalem and after arranging the various elements that would be required to shoot in Jerusalem, Masharawi was denied a permit two days before he was scheduled to leave for filming. After failing to secure the appropriate paperwork through the proper channels, Masharawi and his crew decided to cross into the city illegally and

film anyway (Masharawi “Just Keep”). Jacir also had significant trouble with permits and border crossing while filming *Salt of This Sea*. For Jacir, the primary trouble came when she tried to take her predominantly Palestinian crew to film in Israel. Many of the crew members did not have the correct work permits and would not be granted permits to work in Israel. Jacir had to hire a replacement crew in Israel and would later be banned from returning to Palestine, herself. Both Masharawi and Jacir’s examples also highlight the various types of political acrobatics the directors must perform and the costly and often arbitrary delays that such maneuvering creates for the film project.

The financescapes and technoscapes of Palestinian filmmaking situate Palestinian cinema comfortably among interstitial accented cinemas. However, they also offer some distinguishing markers that can be used to more clearly define prominent characteristics of Palestinian fictional cinema. The landscapes of financing and filming a Palestinian fictional feature film cross nation-state boundaries and are often hampered by international politics. Because the directors typically treat Palestinian issues in their films and the topic of Palestine is always already political, the directors, typically living in exile or diaspora in the West, must navigate Western perceptions of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in order to gain funding. Palestinian filmmaking and therefore Palestinian cinema is, thus, restrained and marked by its reliance on external, transnational funding and technology in measurable ways including the content and aesthetics of the films.

Ethnoscapes and Mediascapes:

The landscapes of audience and access that Palestinian fictional films must navigate are similarly influenced by the political and geographical strictures of the occupation, but still reflect Naficy’s general characteristics of interstitial filmmakers. Naficy points out that a key

characteristic of interstitial filmmakers is that there is an accumulation of labor upon the director (48). It is this characteristic that, as previously mentioned in chapter one, justifies an auteur approach to examining Palestinian films due to the director's extensive involvement with, and therefore, control over the final product. After examining these six directors, it is also clear that they share a number of characteristics in common beyond their love of cinema. These characteristics are imperative to their filmmaking capabilities and function as an important facet of Palestinian film's ethnoscape. With the exception of Rashid Masharawi, none of the filmmakers were born in, and therefore restricted to, the Occupied Territories. Most, including Khleifi, Abu Assad, Nassar, and Suleiman, were born to middle class families in Israel, granting them a passport that would allow for comparably easier international travel. Three of them, Khleifi, Abu Assad and Suleiman, are from the same city within Israel, Nazareth. Jacir was mostly raised in Saudi Arabia, but had what she now refers to as "the 'privilege' of Palestine" (Jacir "I Wanted" 253) when she would visit family in Palestine for extended periods of time. While Masharawi was born in a refugee camp in Gaza and did not come from as much affluence as the other five directors, his general grit and disregard for the Israeli borders allowed him to overcome many of the obstacles that the other directors were able to overcome using their Israeli citizenship and family finances. The financial and social positioning of all six filmmakers increased their likelihood of being exposed to cinema and aided in their ability to travel extensively. All six directors had and took the opportunity to travel outside of Israel and Palestine at some point relatively early in their career. Even Masharawi, whose financial and citizenship situation would have been severely limiting, was able to spend several years in Amsterdam in the mid-1990s. Because Palestinian cinema's ethnoscape encompasses the

landscape of people and their movements, it is worth considering how the directors' ability to cross borders, to be transnational, has shaped the Palestinian accent.

The ability to travel, both within Israel and the Occupied Territories as well as internationally, is perhaps the single most important catalyst for the creation of Palestinian fictional films. Within the West Bank and Gaza, the resources available to this particular cohort of directors, both for education as well as creation, was severely limited. Though there are, in large part thanks to these and other Palestinian filmmakers, more opportunities to view and study film in the West Bank now, there were few, if any, theaters and few, if any, resources available within the West Bank and Gaza for studying or learning filmmaking when these directors were learning their craft. Those directors who grew up in Israel had more access to view films, but their hopes of creating films that represented Palestinians and their struggles would have been severely curtailed had they not also had the opportunity to travel to other countries, where they were able to pursue studies in filmmaking and projects that better reflected their experiences of Palestine with less fear of censorship and cooptation from Israel. Because of the limited resources available to Palestinian filmmakers within the Occupied Territories and Israel, all six filmmakers sought additional education and training, whether formal or informal, in diaspora. While all accented filmmakers, by definition, travel, it is Palestinian fictional filmmakers' traveling that allows them to learn the craft of filmmaking and it is their desire to return to and make films about Palestine that distinguishes them from many other accented filmmakers who may have access to training in their host countries or whose film content may be more focused on life in the host country.

Unlike some accented filmmaking communities who congregate within a particular host country, Palestinian filmmakers have experience and influence from several different countries,

what I have been calling each director's global-local-national nexus. Interestingly, there is significant overlap for several directors in three locations: The Netherlands, France, and the United States. Both Masharawi and Abu Assad received training and funding from the Netherlands at critical points in their career; both Suleiman and Khleifi have extensive experience with France and French culture because they both lived in or near France for lengthy periods of time; France has also played an important role in providing funding both for Palestinian filmmakers who have lived there and those who have not; Abu Assad, Suleiman, and Jacir also all lived in the United States for significant periods of time and have sought funding and technical support from the US for several of their films. What at first seems to be a varied landscape of the rhizomatic life and traveling of six independent filmmakers, is actually a coherent map of the ethnoscape of the six directors that shows significant overlapping spheres of influence from three countries in particular. These influences are most clearly seen in the generic conventions of the film and the aesthetics of the individual directors.

However, the directors' ethnoscape is only one facet of the landscape of people that participate in Palestinian film. The other important and complex feature of the Palestinian film ethnoscape is the audience, which is also another transnational place of multilinguality. Naficy claims that multilinguality "is driven by the many languages of the filmmakers and their crew, the stories they portray and the situated audiences whom they address. Multilinguality makes intelligibility more complex" (50). He goes on to add that "it also impacts the films' reception, as different languages serve multiple communities of address" (Naficy 51). While most accented cinema addresses at least a home and host audience, which more often than not do not share a common language, Palestinian cinema's home and host audiences are especially varied because of the occupation and the nature of the Palestinian diaspora. Within the "home country," there

are at least two audiences, both of which can be difficult to reach: Palestinians living within the West Bank and Gaza and those living within the state of Israel. One could also argue that there is a third Palestinian audience within refugee camps in the surrounding area. For the sake of simplicity and because few directors refer to them as separate from the Palestinian audience in the West Bank and Gaza, I will not treat them as a separate audience at this time. Because it is not primarily housed within a single country, the Palestinian diasporic community is also complex and multilingual. In addition to Palestinians, the international film festivals circuit and other international audiences also comprise a significant portion of the audience for Palestinian films, though audience reaction to the films varies by region as well. However, the audience portion of the Palestinian ethnoscape is not binary nor does it easily fall into the traditional dichotomy of East/West. Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, political autonomy has a greater influence on audience response to Palestinian films than being geographically located in the East or West. Again unsurprisingly, the politics of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict also heavily influence audience response to a given film.

Though Palestinians in diaspora are not typically difficult to reach, perhaps the most consistently difficult audience for Palestinian filmmakers to reach is the Palestinians who are currently living in the West Bank and Gaza. A number of filmmakers, such as Jacir and Masharawi, also see Palestinians as their preferred audience, regardless of how effectively that particular audience is able to access their films. When Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are able to view these films, they often have somewhat different responses to and expectations of the films than Palestinians living in Israel or diaspora, much less the non-Palestinian international audiences. In general, audiences in the West Bank and Gaza tend to prefer more didactic and harsh treatment of the occupation. Masharawi points out that his Palestinian

audiences generally would prefer a more direct political message in his films (Roffey, Prillewitz, and Hourani). Nassar experienced similar criticism from Palestinian audiences for not being harsh enough in his depiction of the occupation (Gertz and Khliefi *Palestinian* 46). Audiences in the West Bank and Gaza also tend to engage with the films more intensely than those audiences that are not experiencing the everyday exigencies of occupation. Suleiman notes that the audience in Ramallah is the only one that stood and clapped as the heroine strode across the border, bringing the guard tower crashing to the ground (Suleiman "Elia" 220), and Jacir also noted more personal and intense reactions to her films among audiences in the Occupied Territories ("Cinema" 46). Though they might prefer harsher or more politically didactic films, audiences in the West Bank and Gaza also tended to view the films in more hopeful terms than viewers in free societies. Both Abu Assad (Garcia) and Jacir ("I Wanted" 249) note this trend in regards to screening their films for Palestinians in the West Bank. Palestinians within the West Bank, who routinely deal with the strictures of occupation, were more likely to identify with characters like Abu Assad's Omar or Jacir's Emad, while Palestinians in refugee camps and diaspora were more likely to identify with characters like Soraya (Jacir "I Wanted" 249). These characters clearly represent the dual sides of the Palestinian audience: those who left and those who remained in the West Bank and Gaza. Given that most of the directors live in exile or diaspora, the representation of the exiled point of view is to be expected. However, the inclusion of characters who represent the life and views of those who choose to stay and live under occupation reflects a very real chasm within the Palestinian population and audience. The ability and willingness of these directors to treat the nuances of this divide within the Palestinian audience is a distinct characteristic of Palestinian fictional film.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and distinctive features of the Palestinian ethnoscape is the way in which the Israeli Occupation influences the perception of various international audiences. Audiences in the United States and the Arab world occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of responses while international film festival audiences appear somewhat more capable of judging the films on their artistic merits rather than their politics. Critics in the Arab world are often particularly harsh on Palestinian films that do not vilify the occupation sufficiently or that critique traditional Arab values. *Wedding in Galilee*, for example, was harshly criticized for its critique of traditional gender roles and the treatment of women within Palestinian society (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 38), and *Chronicle of a Disappearance* was similarly lambasted by Arab critics who, according to Suleiman, misinterpreted the final scene of the film (Gertz and Khleifi *Palestinian* 41-2; Suleiman "Zero" 18). In the United States, film critics tend to have the opposite reaction. *Paradise Now* and *Salt of this Sea* both encountered harsh criticism from American reviewers that centered on the politics of the two films' subject matter, suicide bombing and the right of return, rather than the artistic qualities of the film.

While it is almost impossible to make a film about Palestine that critics in the Arab world and the US can agree upon because of their diametrically opposed political stances on Israel and Palestine in general, the international film festival audiences, which include audiences in the United States and Arab world as well, tend to have more moderate responses to the politics of the films, which allows them to focus on the films as art rather than as political statements. As the nature of a film festival might indicate, film festival audiences focus more on the quality of the films. While politics undoubtedly still plays a role in audience response at films festivals, that response seems to be mediated by their general focus on the quality of films. As a result, most Palestinian fictional films were well received by film festival audiences and those that were not

were rejected based primarily on the artistic flaws of the film rather than its political stance. *Zindeeq*, for example, was not particularly well received by film festival audiences, but the reason cited was that its disjointed plot structure never coherently coalesced for the viewer, not because he did or did not treat the occupation or life in Israel as a Palestinian fairly.

Another area that affects audience response to Palestinian films is the level of political autonomy of the viewer. Jacir points out that audiences who are currently living under strict autocratic regimes or who have experience living under such regimes can more easily identify with her characters and their desire to return to Palestine ("I Wanted" 249). While this observation is perhaps neither surprising nor controversial, it is an important axis of the Palestinian ethnoscape that defies simple geographic binaries.

Because filmmaking is an occupation and films are a commodity, filmmakers must be and are aware of the various audiences to which their films appeal. For Palestinian filmmakers, pleasing their entire ethnoscape is almost impossible because of the various axes along which it forms, but the success of the films and filmmakers alike relies on the filmmaker's ability to create a product that appeals to as much of their ethnoscape as possible. For example, films like Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* or Abu Assad's *Paradise Now* are able to accomplish a broader appeal through a careful use of political ambiguity in their films. In Suleiman's films, he creates ambiguity through his use of non-linearly structured vignettes. Though the viewer is left with concrete impressions after viewing the film, they are not left with a concrete lesson, moral, or statement. Abu-Assad presents ambiguity in his film by including characters who voice multiple sides of the debate surrounding violent resistance. By having one protagonist complete his suicide mission and one withdrawal from the mission, Abu Assad was able to create enough ambiguity to largely satisfy broad audiences. Both of these films were highly successful among

several different facets of the Palestinian ethnoscape. Though, they did not, of course, escape critiques from the fringes. The Palestinian cinema ethnoscape's reception of Palestinian films operates along the rhizomatic axes of the politics of the occupation, the quality of the filmic arts and the political autonomy of the audience members. These responses do not occur in isolation or hierarchically, but rather represent the complex, overdetermined nature of the Palestinian ethnoscape.

The Palestinian mediascape aligns with Naficy's definition of the interstitial mode of accented cinema, but is also fraught with the politics of the occupation. Naficy claims that the often lengthy gap in time between production and distribution of a film is a characteristic of the interstitial mode of accented filmmakers (59). Most Palestinian fictional films suffer from this phenomenon, though it is caused by factors that are specific to the Palestinian political situation. For some films, such as Jacir's *When I Saw You* (Jacir "The Pursuit"), this gap is the result of difficulties with funding. More often, however, the problems with distribution stem from political motivations. Both Khleifi's *Canticle of the Stones* and *The Tale of Three Jewels* suffered delayed distribution for political reasons (Al-Qattan 117), and Masharawi's *Curfew* and *Haifa* also likely suffered because they presented images that were contradictory to the international narrative of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict at the time of production. There is also a host of logistical problems for Palestinian filmmakers based on political pressure and shifting political opinions. *Divine Intervention*'s controversy at the Oscars, which was later followed by *Paradise Now*'s successful nomination, is probably the clearest example of an instance when the politics of occupation impeded the expansion of the Palestinian mediascape.

I have already mentioned how the occupation provides obstacles to access for Palestinians living the West Bank and Gaza and the ways in which the politics surrounding the

Israeli/Palestinian conflict affect audience access and receptivity to the films; however, the politics of the occupation also have measurable effects on the distribution of the films. While most of the films in this dissertation have circulated among international film festivals, more reliable and further reaching distribution channels have been more difficult to obtain. Though several large, independent film distribution companies, such as Kino-Lorber International, have picked up the more successful Palestinian films, such as *Wedding in Galilee*, *Layla's Birthday*, and *Salt of This Sea* and *Paradise Now* was picked up by Warner Independent Pictures, many fictional Palestinian filmmakers must scabble together what distribution they can with smaller, national-level distributors or through television stations. Some films, such as Nassar's *Whispering Embers* or Mashsarawi's early films, may find themselves with little to no distribution at the time of production.

Like the landscapes of finances and technology that Palestinian cinema spans, the landscapes of people and media access are complex and transnational in nature. Travel across borders is imperative both for the creation of the films and for their future distribution, but such travel is frequently hampered by the politics of the occupation. Audience response to the films varies based on location, political orientation toward the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and the relative autonomy of the individual viewer. Such complex ethnoscares result in the necessity of ambiguity to the success of films that treat political "hot topics."

Ideoscares

Like fiancescapes, technoscapes, ethnoscares, and mediascapes, the ideoscapes of the Palestinian cinematic accent are similar to those outlined by Naficy for accented cinema in general, but are also deeply inflected by the occupation and the difficulties it creates for the

Palestinian people. The accented cinema themes of journeys and exile/displacement are particularly prominent in Palestinian fictional films and are particularly inflected by the experience of occupation and the desire to establish Palestinian national identity and history.

In the films I treat in this dissertation, journeys and themes of exile and displacements are often conveyed through blocked spaces and the stoppage of time. While these particular chronotopes are not unique to Palestinian cinema, their commonality, severity and method of imposition are. Roadblocks, checkpoints, borders, confinement within cars, and border guards are so ubiquitous in Palestinian film that they are some of the strongest visual indicators of the Palestinian filmic accent. Every film I treat in this dissertation contains images at borders and within cars. However, unlike most accented films, the borders and blocked space in Palestinian fictional films are neither self-imposed nor optional. While many accented films treat topics of borders and exile/return, the borders in those films are often crossed of the characters' own relatively free will and design; whereas, Palestinians' movements are severely curtailed, not by their own will or even their own government, but by a foreign occupation that exerts extreme control over borders and movement within the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians who wish to leave sometimes cannot and those who wish to return are frequently not allowed. The precariousness of place that the occupation creates for Palestinians is reflected in the themes of journeys and exile/displacement in that these themes are frequently used to reflect the effect of blocked space and time on Palestinian identity and to reinforce the Palestinian narrative of the injustices of the Israeli occupation. As previously mentioned in chapter four, the frequent inclusion of both closed and transitional chronotopes that is so frequent in Palestinian fictional films and that usually occurs during journeys indicates that the Palestinian cultural identity is traumatized, fractured, and frozen in time; however, the directors frequently use the juxtaposition

of these chronotopes to open new spaces of resistance, which also indicates that the Palestinian identity, in the face of such extreme physical and temporal impediments, is resilient and persistent.

In addition to the themes of journeys and exile/return that Naficy outlines as typical for accented cinema, however, Palestinian fictional films also contain at least two themes that are not so common across accented cinema in general, though they can likely be found in a handful of other, similarly situated accented cinemas: the prominence of resistance and psychological trauma. Both of these themes, as previously mentioned, also function to shape Palestinian identity and historicity in that they explore the role of resistance and prolonged psychological trauma in relation to Palestinian existence and identity. Due to the somewhat unique nature of the Palestinian situation of prolonged and increasingly restrictive military occupation, these themes are pervasive in Palestinian cinema, but are not as common in accented cinema in general. There is also a general trend toward more individualized approaches to Palestinian identity and a greater tolerance for ambiguity in later films such as Suleiman's trilogy and Abu Assad's *Paradise Now* and *Omar*. While most accented films include a quest for wholeness of identity (Naficy 290), and some Palestinian fictional films join this quest, the trend towards more nuanced and individual approaches to Palestinian identity is an important distinction between Palestinian fictional film and accented film in general.

The landscapes of ideologies in Palestinian fictional films, as reflected in their common themes, indicate both the need to conceptualize a Palestinian identity and history that is counter to Palestinian stereotypes promoted by Israel and to resist the Israeli occupation. In general, the themes of blocked spaces, borders, journeys of exile and return, cultural celebrations, depictions of physical violence, and psychologically disturbed characters function to open up spaces for the

reconceptualization and reconstruction of Palestinian cultural identity. The films also use these themes to visually depict the ways in which Palestinians suffer at the hands of the Israeli occupation on a daily basis and undermine the hegemonic Israeli narrative that the occupation is needed for security. Emphasizing the status of Palestinians as victims of occupation and the complexity inherent in that position also allows the films to focus on the methods of and need for resistance to the occupation.

Conclusions

Through a detailed analysis of these six directors, a number of trends arise that can be used to clearly demarcate characteristics that comprise the heart of Palestinian fictional cinema. Palestinian fictional cinema, in its clearest form, is derived from a complex transnational process of international finance, production, and distribution. To use Naficy's terms, the mode of production for Palestinian fictional cinema is primarily interstitial, but is importantly influenced by partnerships, mentoring, and friendships with other Palestinian filmmakers that add a collective facet to the process. The ability to travel internationally and across borders within Israel/Palestine is also imperative in order for these filmmakers to both obtain the knowledge and training necessary for creating a film, and also to access the materials needed to create films in the West Bank and Gaza. The influences acquired during these travels often appear in the style of individual filmmakers and, because of the scattered nature of the Palestinian diaspora, vary significantly from director to director. Palestinian fictional films are also deeply intertwined with the politics and realities of the Israeli occupation of Palestine on almost every level, which is perhaps one reason nationalist readings of the films are so popular. The technical creation of the films is hampered by both the international politics and the physical realities of the occupation,

while the themes that are most prominent across the body of filmmakers in this dissertation all function to highlight the importance of resistance to the occupation, though the type and degree of resistance proffered by each film varies. Simultaneously, these themes also function to offer counter hegemonic narratives of Palestinian history and lived experience and open spaces to reaffirm Palestinian cultural identity while also critiquing and reconstructing the elements of traditional cultural identity that the directors find problematic.

While examining Palestinian films in relation to specific conflicts or as always and primarily an attempt to establish a national narrative can be productive, my analysis reveals at least one important trend that such approaches miss. By categorizing and analyzing these films according to time and content, a shift in accent that is not explicable by *intifadas*, international politics, or differences in individual directors can be seen. The shift from collective conceptualizations of Palestinian identity and nationalism to focusing on individual experiences is a topic that has been highlighted in the extent literature. This literature (Junka-Akio, Alexander; Gertz and Khleifi) typically situates the change as the result of a new generation of directors who have a more complicated relationship to views of nationalism. However, my analysis indicates that several directors participate in both the collective and individualistic trends. While Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee* focuses primarily on the village and community, his *Zindeeq* is entirely focused on the singular experience of an individual character. Masharawi's films similarly include collective visions of family and village in *Curfew* and *Haifa* respectively, while also drawing on fragmented individual experiences in later films like *Ticket to Jerusalem* and *Layla's Birthday*. This trend away from the collective and toward the individual, therefore, cannot be said to emanate from the new perspective of directors like Suleiman and Abu Assad,

but must be viewed as a shift in the genre as a whole as the result of the prolonged occupation and continued fragmentation of the West Bank and Gaza.

This analysis also holds implications for the concept of accented cinema in general. Though Naficy's definition of accented film is thorough and enlightening for examining a particular director or region, it does not indicate, as this study appears to, that cinematic accents, like linguistic and regional accents, can and do change over time. In terms of financing and production, the availability of Arabic and Palestinian funding for Palestinian film projects has increased as has the pool of local talent in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian fictional filmic accent of the late 1980s and early 1990s focused on the connection between Palestinians and the land and often sought to reinforce concepts of national unity. By the 2010s, however, this accented had shifted and is now focused on the fragmentation of Palestinian land and identity as well as the difficulties of living under occupation. If such a significant shift in cinematic creation and accent can happen over the course of two decades, accented cinemas with longer histories likely also experience generic shifts that are worth exploring.

Though I have described a number of trends that directly inflect the accent of Palestinian fictional feature film and function to help define the genre, the filmic accent of any director or region, as previously mentioned, is not stable. In the Palestinian case, several more recent developments have the potential to cause significant shifts in the Palestinian filmic accent and genre. Specifically, Abu Assad's *Omar* and Jacir's *When I Saw You* were significant strides towards creating undeniably Palestinian films through their reliance on predominantly, if not entirely, Palestinian funds. Because of the nature of how films are labeled in the international film market, creating films with Palestinian money reduces the likelihood of Palestinian films to be mislabeled or labeled as a product of the country that provided the most financial support for

the project. Through the combined efforts of most of the directors mentioned in this project, the available pool of Palestinians with the technical skills required on a film set has also grown. Directors such as Abu Assad, Jacir, Khleifi, and Masharawi insist on using as much local talent as possible in creating their works, while Suleiman helped establish the Film and Media Studies program at Birzeit University in the West Bank. These directors have also been influential in expanding access to Palestinian films through various attempts at mobile cinemas that travel to smaller towns in the West Bank with the specific goal of showing Palestinian films. Masharawi, in particular, established a mobile cinema and a production company in Ramallah before his exile. Additionally, over the last several years, several large cinemas have reopened in the West Bank, further expanding access to films in general, potentially sparking more interest in the field, though they largely play commercial films. Taken individually, these incidents may seem like disconnected and unrelated events, but when taken together, they seem to suggest a progress, perhaps ever so slight, toward establishing the necessary infrastructure, funding and distribution channels in the West Bank in order to one day have a formal Palestinian film industry which would, undoubtedly, significantly alter the content and creation of future Palestinian fictional films.

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